

Volume IV

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

On the Wings of the Swan

Volume IV



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013

GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA

23rd–27th October 2013

On the Wings of the Swan

Volume IV

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger,
from 1996 to 1997.*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

© Bihar School of Yoga 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from Yoga Publications Trust.

The terms Satyananda Yoga® and Bihar Yoga® are registered trademarks owned by International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM). The use of the same in this book is with permission and should not in any way be taken as affecting the validity of the marks.

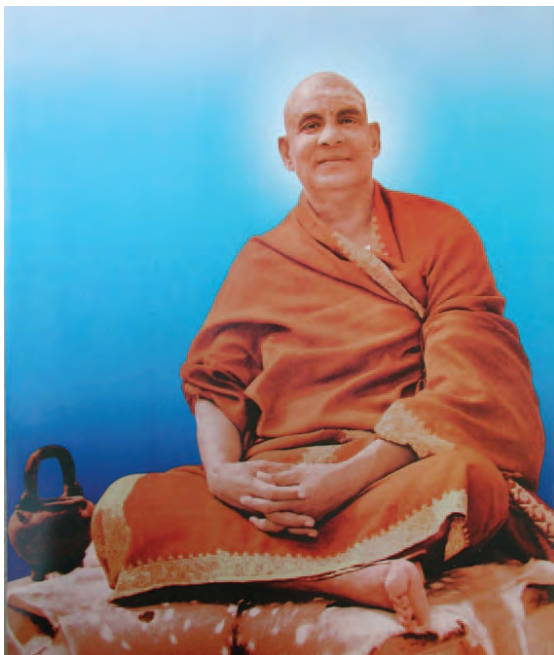
Published by Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2012

ISBN: 978-93-81620-26-7

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

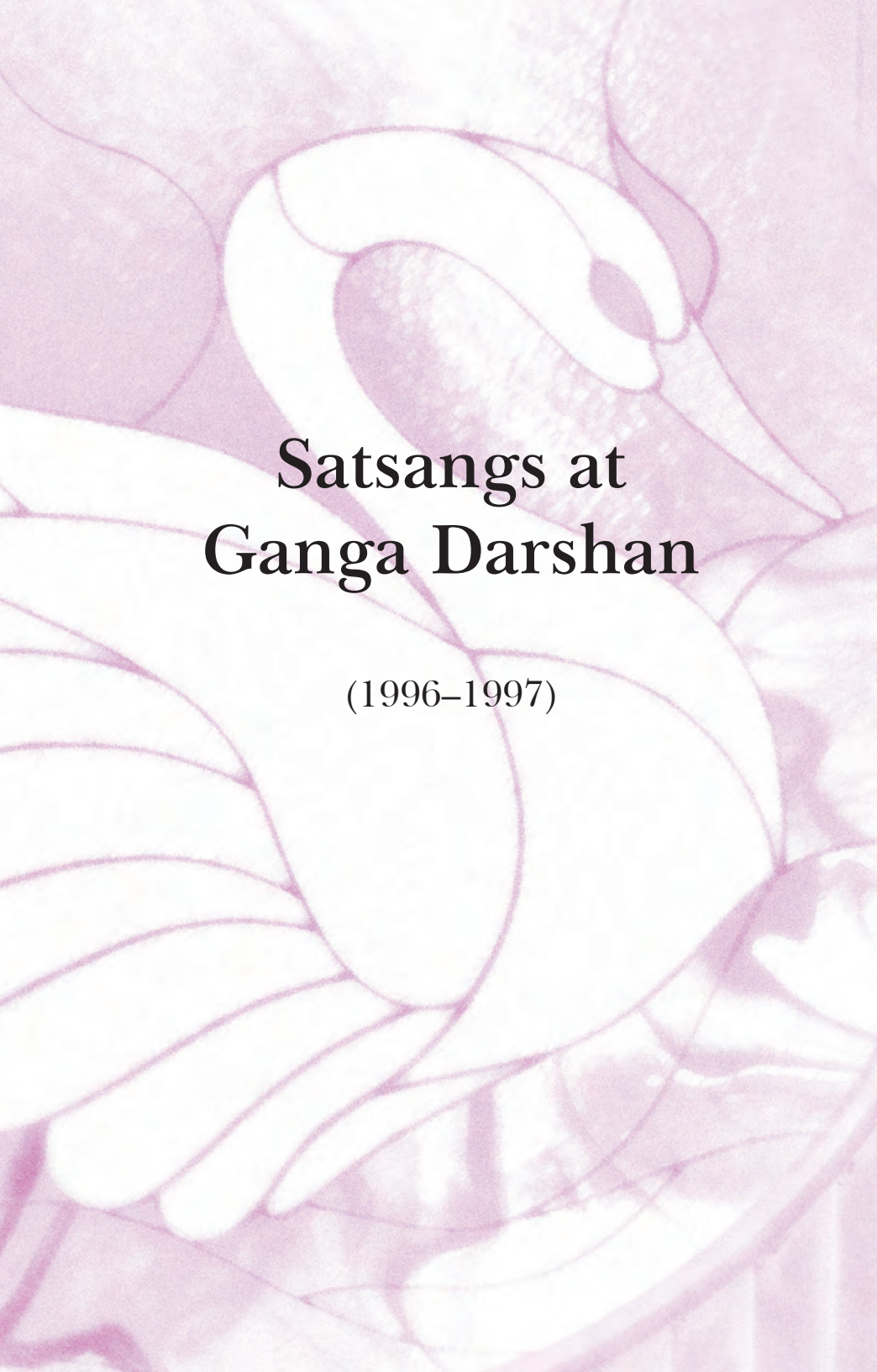
Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.rikhiapeeth.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Satsangs at Ganga Darshan

(1996–1997)



As I continue doing yoga practices I become more and more sensitive. How can I prevent myself from getting affected by someone else's unhealthy mind? How can I strengthen the weakness that allows this phenomenon to happen?

Try to live the way that I live. Let us consider a few points. One, people are generally not aware of their subconscious and unconscious response to different situations and people. Two, when we practise yoga and feel ourselves becoming sensitive, we observe the interaction of sensitivity in relation to the environment and other people, and not in relation to ourselves. Three, we lack a clear and positive sankalpa in life. These are the three factors which come to my mind immediately in relation to the question.

Generally, we function at the level of external *buddhi*, intellect, which makes us more aware of the actual sensory input rather than the intuitive input. By sensory input I mean not just the physical dimension, but also the mental and emotional dimension related to self-image, prestige and so on. The intuitive aspect of our life is blocked. When I say intuitive, I mean awareness of the deeper level of interaction which takes place at the subtle level of our personality.

The moment we become aware of our subtle as well as our external personality, we have greater control over the expression of our mind, otherwise we express ourselves in

a certain way externally, but our inner mind is in turmoil. We project a particular image of ourselves, but we are not like that deep inside, and so there is a subconscious conflict. When you begin to practise yoga, do not see yourself as interacting only on the external physical plane but also on the subtle, intuitive plane. That is the concept of the *drashta* or seer that the *Yoga Sutras* talk about. If we can become the *drashta*, we can control and direct our sensitivity so that it does not affect us in a negative way.

When we become sensitive we simply react and respond in a disharmonious way. If, for instance, someone does not agree with our ideas and rejects our views, it leads to insecurity and a deterioration of our self-image. However, if we can maintain balance of mind and try to understand the viewpoint of the other person, many such problems can be avoided. The secret is to have a positive direction or *sankalpa* in life. Many people do not have this. Sometimes, we base our aim on moral principles that we are unable to fulfil, or on a concept about which we have no real understanding, so we fail.

The *sankalpa* has to be very simple, clear and definite, not alien to our nature, lifestyle, environment or culture. We want our children to be like Rama, Krishna, Buddha, or Gandhi; however, we do not give them the opportunity to develop in that way. The circumstances and social environment are not conducive to bringing about that level of change in one's lifestyle. So what is the use of giving the example of Rama, Krishna, or Buddha to our child and telling them to be like that? We tell our children to be truthful, but we never tell them that speaking the truth can be difficult at times and can create problems that have to be managed. How will they manage those problems if we do not tell them? We do not have that experience either.

A *sankalpa* should not be based on ethical or moral values but on the practical realities of life. Self-realization is abstract and does not mean anything. If you think self-realization means something, then you are already self-realized and do not need to practise yoga. And as for divine experiences,

forget about it! You will not have divine experiences through the practice of yoga. You are going to encounter all the fears, inhibitions, ego-trips and power plays that are deeply rooted within you before you can have divine experiences.

Make your sankalpa very basic, simple and practical. You have to choose it for yourself, no one else can choose it for you. Once you have made your sankalpa, you will be able to manage your sensitivity very effectively. Your sankalpa will help you.

Can karmas be defined as being ‘good’ or ‘bad’?

Karmas are of three kinds, according to the examples given by Sri Swamiji at different times. The first type of karma is genetic karma which comes down to us from our father or mother: the physical, mental and emotional conditioning of our personality. The second type of karma is cultural or environmental, related to the influences of the culture or cultures to which we are exposed. The third type of karma is spiritual or sanchit karma. *Sanchita* is the accumulated karma that has come down to us from our previous lives. These are the three major divisions of karma.

At various times we express a different karma. Events can trigger the flow of spiritual karma. There are moments that can trigger the genetic or cultural karma. We do not know which of these karmas are being triggered at any given moment, because we do not have such deep understanding of our karma.

Along with karma there is another aspect involved, the *gunas*, or qualities which are inherent in everyone. These qualities are sattwic, rajasic and tamasic. If a person is sattwic by nature, the expression of his spiritual, cultural and genetic karma will be sattwic, and the karma will be expressed as *satkarma*, pious deeds. If an individual is tamasic by nature, the karma will be expressed as negative deeds, *dushkarma*.

I once read a story in the form of a dialogue between a priest and a dying man. It was the most beautiful literary work I had come across. In an attempt to make the dying

man confess, the priest says, “All the good and bad deeds done in your life should be analyzed. Now is the time to seek forgiveness.” The dying man replies, “For what? Why should I seek forgiveness? I’m not in control of my actions. It is She who made me act the way I did. It is She who has made me who I am. It is She who made me collect flowers instead of hurting the trees, so that beautiful fruits can be received from them.” The priest gets very offended when this dying man refers to God as She. He argues, “No, you are wrong, it is not She, it is He.” But the dying man insists, “No, it is She.”

Now, people can look at this from different angles. One can say that the dying man was referring to his lover or wife who made him perform all the silly acts in life, but one can also view it as a discussion about Purusha and Prakriti. I tend to look at it from that viewpoint. When I was reading this work, it struck me that what the dying man said is absolutely true. If we look at it from the Samkhya point of view, ‘She’ refers to Nature who is making us do everything, whereas ‘He’ is only a passive witness. Both are omnipotent and omniscient; both are aware of what is right and what is wrong. With Her in front and Him up above, nothing can be termed as right or wrong. They are aware of what is being done by the individual. If they are the representation of Nature and Divinity, then we are subject to their input into our personality, and that input is in the form of the gunas.

Although yoga says that karmas are nothing but impressions, not in the mind but in the field of consciousness, they cannot be taken as satkarmas or dushkarmas. They are simply expressions of the quality which is predominant within us at any given time which can make us collect only flowers instead of the fruits. If we collect flowers and ignore the fruits then we have missed something. Later on, when we analyze the opportunity we have missed, we feel guilty, “Oh, I missed that opportunity. I could have collected the fruits and satisfied my hunger, but I did not!” Some people may view what I am doing as a negative action, but that only reflects their social outlook.

Definitely, certain things are considered negative, but that negativity is the expression of a manifest quality, just as positivity is an expression of a manifest quality, tamoguna and sattwaguna. The concept of satkarma and dushkarma does not exist. Of course, in order to develop sattwic awareness, we have to change our performance, attitude, behaviour, and so forth.

There is no force or power other than our own selves to keep an account of our deeds. If we think of a power different from ourselves then we have no concept or understanding of that power, because we are trying to analyze it with our mind, which is limited. The power is there and it is part of the self also. It is what we call omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. The power is there, but we have to recognize it. In the absence of the recognition of this power, we can create many fantasies, but once that force is recognized, there are no more questions. The knowledge of power comes with wisdom and the doubt concerning power comes with ignorance, but the power is there.

Would you explain the differences between trataka on a candle flame at a short distance, trataka on the jyoti in the Jyoti Mandir, and distant trataka on the sun or moon?

Light is used in trataka to improve the physical eyesight, whether it is performed on a candle flame, the sun, the moon or any other bright image. Mentally, it helps us identify with the inner nature of the spirit, which is light. Trataka helps us focus the sensory activities on one point and induces the state of pratyahara. It helps to quieten the mental agitation. Trataka can also be performed on images that are non-luminous, and it gives a different benefit physically, psychologically and spiritually.

The image should be in focus whenever you do trataka. That is one of the basic rules, it should not be blurred. If you are doing trataka on a candle flame which is one arm's length away from you, then the image is quite clear and sharply defined, but if you try to practise trataka on the jyoti

in Jyoti Mandir, and from where you are sitting the image is blurred, you should not do it.

Would you please tell us a funny story?

There was a farmer who purchased some absolutely barren land. Nothing was growing on it, and there were no facilities. It was a hopeless piece of land. Beside the land was a church where a priest lived. Every day the priest would look out and see the farmer working very hard on this barren piece of land. After about one and a half years, this barren land developed into a very beautiful garden, the pride of that region.

One day, the priest visited the farmer and said to him, “You and the Lord have done a commendable job on this land.” The farmer replied, “Yeah, you should have seen it when the Lord had it all to himself!”

In the class on the *Yoga Sutras* we were discussing ‘*Om sadhana*’ and the transcendence of time, space and object. The class felt unclear about the concept of space. Could you please explain?

Om is considered to be the primordial sound. In every ancient scripture it has been said that in the beginning there was a vibration, a word, a sound, a force or a vibratory field. That cosmic vibratory field has always existed and will continue to exist.

The sages identified that sound as *Om*, in Sanskrit, and as ‘Amen’ or ‘Amin’, etc., in other languages. What is universally agreed upon are the sounds ‘A’ and ‘M’, and I do not think this should be taken as a religious belief or *Om* as being a religious sound. The discoveries of the sages and saints have followed the same pattern the world over in relation to this primordial cosmic sound. There is therefore a universal agreement about it.

In the Upanishads it has been stated that *Om* is the source of creation. It is the past, present and future, which means that the vibratory field of the whole of creation is one. If we

hear a humming sound, we can hear the vibration of the consonant 'M'. Wherever there is vibration there is bound to be frequency; wherever there is movement there is bound to be vibration. This is the law of physics, and it is also the statement of the different spiritual traditions. We can call it the 'law of spirituality'.

If you could look into the molecular, atomic and subatomic structure of your own body, you would find the nucleus vibrating at the centre of every atom. If you were able to listen to the sound of that vibration, you would have a similar realization. We are looking at something within ourselves which is totally invisible to the naked eye and yet within that totally invisible object, we can hear a sound, a frequency. That sound exists at both the microcosmic and macrocosmic level. It is the Sanskrit mantra *Om*.

Yogis have said that each sound frequency is associated with a particular *tattwa* or element. If you look at yogic physiology you will come across the chakras. In the centre of each chakra there is a seed sound or *bija* mantra. *Om* is situated in ajna chakra. It is the seed sound of ajna chakra. Below ajna chakra are five other chakras which represent the different tattwas. Mooladhara represents earth; swadhisthana, water; manipura, fire; anahata, air; and vishuddhi, space.

As the seed sound of ajna, *Om* is the source of all creation. It is the bridge between microcosmic and macrocosmic existence, the doorway leading from mundane to transcendental. If we go one step beyond ajna into the realization of *Om* we experience cosmic unity in sahasrara. However, if we take one step towards external manifestation then we encounter the first subtle element, *akasha tattwa*, space. Therefore, even in the yogic tradition, *Om* has been identified as the source of physical creation and the doorway to cosmic unity.

Time, space and object are the terms that we use in physics to define a process of experience. Experience is never complete if there is one element missing from this triad. Normal human perception revolves around the recognition

of these three ideas. An object exists in space and time. Our understanding of time is clock time, body clock time, and so on, but apart from this there is also cosmic time. Different traditions have spoken about the cosmic concept of time.

Space is the all-pervading experience in which time can be experienced as physical and non-physical, manifest and unmanifest, and in which objects can be experienced. The absolute manifestation of time, space and object and their divisions are clearly experienced when we live at the level of mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura; however, the divisions become hazy when we move into the higher chakras and to the source of our being which is the sound of *Om*.

Do emotions belong to the heart or the mind?

The idea of mind and heart is not physical; rather they are the functions of one complete being: you, me, all of us as individuals. We interact in life in two ways: one is linear, mathematical and sequential; the other is artistic and creative. Linear interaction is related to the mind; artistic ability is related to the heart. Again, I will repeat that the idea of mind and heart is not a physical concept. The mind is not situated inside the brain. The experiences of the mind are not only inside the brain, and, the experiences of the heart are not felt only inside the physical heart.

When you think intensely your heart does not react, it does not palpitate furiously, your blood pressure does not shoot up, but when you are under some kind of duress, anxiety, anger or fear, then the physical heart responds to the situation. That is a different aspect altogether. We are not talking about that. We are talking about the mind and heart being the two attributes of our life; one the linear, sequential and mathematical process, known as the mind, and the other the artistic and creative process, known as the heart.

We have moved through three phases in the course of our evolution. When we first appeared on this planet, we were very much instinctive beings, reacting to different situations without thinking, without analyzing or even feeling. That

space is known in yogic terminology as *daharakasha*, the lower or deep space encompassing mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras. As we evolved, we began to respond to different feelings and not to thoughts. When we met with a sabre-toothed tiger or a mammoth, or when another tribe came to attack us, we would feel fear. When we went to attack them, we would feel a kind of elation. Thus, we started working with our *hridayakasha* area, the heart space, experienced between manipura and vishuddhi chakras. As we evolved further, we moved up, and now we live in *chidakasha*, the head space. In fact, many of us have actually lost the ability to feel because we have become so sequential, so mathematical. We have lost the ability to feel and to be creative. We consider our intellect to be superior.

There is a question as to which is superior in our life, the emotions or intelligence. These simply represent two aspects of human nature. The mind, the linear process, has two attributes, the positive and the negative. When the mind thinks in a negative way it can do a lot of harm, and when it thinks in a positive way it can do a lot of good. When negative emotions like fear, anger or rejection, arise they harm the body and the personality. When positive emotions manifest, such as love, compassion, generosity or affection, they uplift us in many ways we do not even understand.

Everyone believes the heart to be the source of emotions because in the process of our evolution, feelings and emotions developed first and rationality second. Some have moved from *daharakasha*, the mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura area, to *hridayakasha*, the anahata, vishuddhi area. Now we are in the *chidakasha* area, the intellectual, analytical area. We have all these different concepts, but ultimately the heart and mind should be taken as two attributes of the one human nature.

In a satsang during the yajna, Sri Swamiji said that service towards others is based on competence and qualifications, not on feelings and emotions. In this context, can you

please tell us what the complementary human qualities are that we have to develop in order to become a good yoga teacher?

The question has been answered by the words ‘competence’ and ‘qualifications’, which say it all. Many yoga teachers are very knowledgeable about the theory and practice of yoga, but are unable to feel and assess the actual need of the practitioner. I may know everything about yoga; however, I may not be able to teach according to the need of another person because I may not have the ability to recognize their actual requirement.

There are two issues here: the concept of yoga, and why people come to yoga. The concept of yoga has evolved, along with how people from different parts of the world understood it. Thirty years ago nobody knew the word ‘yoga’, and for many it was just a philosophy or a system of physical training, a method by which to trim the waistline, to pull in the stomach and keep fit.

As researchers began to experiment with the yogic practices, concepts changed. Now we see the application of yoga in the management of many social and psychological difficulties and imbalances, and whatever the process of evolution in our own understanding and approach to yoga may be, skills are needed. One has to be qualified and competent to teach yoga. This is where the difficulty comes in. There are many people who teach hard yoga, strong yoga, without actually assessing the physical and psychological limitations of the student, and that can harm the student, therefore first understand why a person has come to yoga.

There are many reasons why people come to yoga. One reason is for therapy. Here the teacher needs to be competent and qualified enough to understand the requirements of the student, and be able to complement the existing therapy with the appropriate yoga practices. They have to incorporate the yoga practices in a smooth, gentle and systematic form, in order to help the student overcome their particular problem.

Another reason people come to yoga is for the promotion of their health, because they have heard yoga is good for the body and the mind. They come with the hope of building up their physical, mental and psychological immunity, so they can cope with life better.

Another group of people come to relax through yoga, to manage their mental and psychological stress. When the different people come, the yoga practices have to be taught accordingly, because no one set of practices can apply to each and every one. Each person needs a different set of yoga practices, so one has to be competent and qualified to teach yoga. This competence and qualification can only come when one is able to assess the need of another person, not before.

What role does surrender and egolessness play for disciples of yours and Sri Swamiji's who are teaching yoga?

Surrender and egolessness are not a requirement for every yoga teacher. It is not a necessity until or unless you are able to devote yourself fully to teaching yoga and experiencing it in your own life. The majority of people who wish to become yoga teachers have a motive, be it social or financial. Yoga is definitely coming up as a profession nowadays. Gone are the good old days when you could just wander around and teach yoga and not bother about anything else. That situation has changed completely.

We started off thirty-two years ago as a simple group of people who had no inclination to get involved in organizations or administration. We had taken sannyasa, we were practising yoga, and the rules of sannyasa required that we isolate ourselves from involvement in public life and concentrate on the perfection of our own sadhana. We believed that, once we became perfect through yoga, we could impart that knowledge to people who were interested.

We found an increasing demand for yoga as people's awareness grew about the use and validity of the yoga practices. Our own attitude had to change in order to meet

their demand. Previously, people came to yoga for their own personal reasons, either wanting to learn meditation, understand theory, concept and philosophy of yoga, or find some type of relief from their physical and psychological disorders.

Today, there is pressure from the government to teach yoga to different levels of society. At present, swamis are teaching yoga in prisons. Only today we have completed the first phase of a teacher training course in eight prisons in the state of Bihar. The government has also made it mandatory to teach yoga therapy at medical schools and colleges. We have to meet this need, but we are not medical people. We are yoga teachers. Medical people need to be trained in order to teach medical students.

In the month of January, the federal government sent out a circular to all the universities in India. It said all universities which receive grants and funding from the federal government must enter into a contract with the Bihar School of Yoga, who then has to send a yoga teacher to each university. If a university fails to enter into an agreement with us, it is mentioned very clearly that they will not get their grants. We have a demand to send over three hundred qualified certificate holders to the different universities of India by the end of March. However, if we send people they will not be sannyasins, they will be ordinary people with responsibilities and commitments to their family and society. They will have to be paid by the universities. What role will egolessness and surrender play in such a situation?

Egolessness and surrender are personal, not social aspects. You can be egoless in your own life. You can try to surrender, and if you can express such qualities in a spontaneous way then that is a different matter, but it is not the requirement of each and every yoga teacher. The main requirement of each and every yoga teacher is competence.

In the coming days, there is going to be a greater demand for yoga teachers who possess a good knowledge and understanding of yoga, along with a degree or diploma,

and we have to be ready for it. This is the scene in India; however, there is also an international demand with which we cannot cope.

In Colombia, after the convention in October, I told them to close the ashram because we could not deal with the demand, “No teaching yoga in the ashram. We only have to prepare yoga teachers.” There is an agreement with the government of Colombia that those teachers will be officially recognized and that yoga teaching will become a profession. Just as you can have a professor of physics, maths or history, one can be a professor of yoga.

In Europe we are facing the same situation. At one time we could boast of ten thousand yoga teachers in Europe, but today those yoga teachers of the seventies and early eighties can no longer cope with the demand of the nineties. So, there is a very big gap. Now yoga has to be taken up by those people who wish to teach in a purely professional way. I do not mean in terms of finances or lifestyle, but of having a good solid, academic understanding of yoga. As an individual you can go as far as you want; you can renounce society, go to the mountains and live alone, practise your surrender and egolessness sadhana. It is up to you. However, if you want to be part of a social transformation then a different level of understanding of yoga is required.

Yoga has to be seen from two different viewpoints. One is personal and the other is professional. Until you become an adept or a good practitioner you will not be able to become a professional teacher, because yoga is not a subject you can read in books and then go out and teach. Yoga is not structured that way. I do not think it will ever come to that stage where professors of yoga will simply rely on books, and fortunately there are very few books on the subject of yoga. Many people can write many things, but the concept of yoga is not known to everyone. An individual who picks up the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali or the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* of Swatmarama, and who studies, memorizes them and writes a thesis on them will still never become a professor of yoga.

The whole system of yoga is based on personal involvement and as an individual you have the right, the freedom and the choice to go as deep as you want.

Do not forget another important thing. Once you begin to practise yoga a chain reaction takes place in your personality. Asanas, pranayama and meditation will all influence your psychic body. Yoga is not only a physical or mental science. It is an integral science. If you practise hatha yoga your mind will undergo a transformation. It may happen after a few months or a few years. The time period is irrelevant. The pranas will mature, and with the maturing of the pranas the mind and psyche will also be affected.

Therefore, yoga can only be understood when it is practised, and in the process of practising there are moments when you have to deal with yourself. Why do we practise antar mouna? Just to release stress? Why do we practise yoga nidra? Just to feel relaxation? No, there is a deeper effect which we are unable to feel on a conscious level, changing us internally, a fraction each time. If you are involved in the personal practice of yoga, your mind will undergo a change and you may feel a desire to serve others, a need to become egoless. Then you may feel the need to surrender.

Please define consciousness?

Consciousness has been defined in many ways by different traditions. The most definite and clear concepts of consciousness can be found in the philosophies of tantra, yoga and Vedanta. The vedic and yogic philosophies have defined consciousness in terms of joint groups; however, these groups do not fall into the category of conscious, subconscious and unconscious. In fact, even modern psychology is very uncertain about what happens at the unconscious level. We can speculate, but there is very little evidence as to the functions of the unconscious and subconscious levels. Even the conscious aspect has not been clearly defined.

In yogic and vedic terminology, the Sanskrit words used to define the four broad categories of consciousness are

jagrit, swapna, nidra and turiya. *Jagrat* means 'to be fully aware'. Swapna is translated as the dream state but it does not mean that. *Swa* means self and *swapna* means 'when consciousness is not externalized in the world of the senses'. *Nidra* means absence of conscious perception. *Turiya* means 'when all the external divisions of consciousness are no more and it is seen as one time, space and object'. There is awareness and experience of all three. In the swapna dimension there is awareness of time and space. In nidra there is only the experience of space. In turiya, time, space and object are seen as one.

Within the realm of jagriti, the awakened state, there are divisions of consciousness. Likewise, there are further divisions of consciousness within the realms of swapna and turiya. There are twenty-one divisions in the philosophy of tantra. Yoga has touched upon these twenty-one states and maintains that they can be experienced through personal effort and sublimated. Yoga calls them patalas, chakras and lokas.

What is the yogic view concerning ambition and aim?

Ambition is related to the ego principle and can be either selfish and tamasic, rajasic, or selfless and sattwic; 99.9 percent of people have tamasic or rajasic ambition. Yoga holds that you should recognize those ambitions and find out whether they are relevant to your life or not. If the ambitions are not relevant then you should drop them, but if they are relevant you should determine whether they are tamasic, rajasic or selfish, and determine how far you can progress in life with that mentality. It is possible that in order to fulfil your own ambitions you are destroying the hopes of many other people. It is the recognition of ambition and its quality that yoga supports and not the destruction of ambition.

Yoga emphasizes that everyone should have an aim or a goal they can work towards with all their energies and faculties. A high aim and an ordinary aim are two different things. Having a high aim means a person aspires to reach great heights without due consideration of their ability,

strength and wisdom. Remove the word ‘high’ and keep the aim. When you keep your aim in life it implies that you have observed and come to know yourself, and you are applying wisdom, creativity and all your faculties constructively in order to attain that aim.

Yoga supports that kind of aim, it is not against it. It advises that we should know our strengths and limitations so we can create an aim according to our ability and qualities. There was never a person in the world without any aim and ambition and there never will be.

Is a certificate all we need to be a yoga teacher?

A certificate is only a piece of paper. Never ever consider yourself to be a teacher of yoga if you want to experience its essence, because learning, practising and living yoga is an on-going process and one can never be a master. One can only be an eternal student, going deeper and deeper into the experience.

There is a saying in the *Bhagavad Gita* in relation to *bhakti*, devotion, but it is applicable to the practise of yoga too. Krishna tells Arjuna that in order to attain Godhood or perfection, it is necessary for the mind be completely focused, and identify with the concept and quality of Godhood or perfection. Once the mind is fixed, the intellect has to be burned. Now this is a very peculiar statement, fixation of mind and burning of intellect; however, it applies to all of us in the sense that the mind represents the inner nature and the intellect represents the rationality of the inner nature.

Identification of the mind and inner nature, with the goal of life, must be there in order to experience continuity in the path. The imposed concepts, beliefs and ideas that relate to the ego structure have to be dissolved. The moment we dissolve the intellect, which is identifying with the ego structure of our personality, “I am a good teacher”, “I enjoy teaching”, “I do this”, “I like that”, then there are no mental barriers to overcome. The moment we develop the idea “I know”, we create a resistance to learning, but if we are in

tune with our inner nature then every moment of the day can become a moment of learning. Experience is the best teacher, so we have to aspire for the experience and not just the intellectual understanding.

Is there any practice or guideline in the yogic tradition concerning death and dying, particularly in relation to the acceptance of death?

The yogic and sannyasa traditions say very little about this. However, there are some concepts or theories, both in yoga and in the sannyasa tradition, which talk of death and dying.

Please understand that there is a basic cultural difference between eastern and western civilizations. In general, the East has given greater thought to human life than the West, whether in regard to Buddhism, Jainism, Shintoism, Confucianism or any other 'ism', including the different aspects of Hinduism, such as the Vaishnavas, Shaivas, Shaktas, Vedantins or Nyayas. They have all accepted that the life process has to be seen as a continuity of spirit.

Death is only the changing of clothing of the spirit as it enters different bodies. This teaching is also given in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, tantras, nyayas and smritis. The shedding of the body, as a snake sheds its skin, is not a major concern for those who understand the Eastern tradition. Sri Swamiji says that people are afraid of death and do not want to even hear the word 'death', because it brings with it the sense of losing everything that one holds dear. There is the fear of losing those things that are known to us, which we consider to be our own. Death means entering a totally unexplored area of existence, so it definitely provokes a lot of fear.

Sri Swamiji also says that people should be glad when the time of death comes, because at that time God is giving them the opportunity to enter a new model vehicle. He says that his car is a 1923 model, and that you cannot even get spare parts for it nowadays, so it is better if that vehicle is disposed

of and God gives him a new model. This has always been the attitude of people in India: it is ingrained in the basic philosophy, in the psychological structure of the people. It is in this context that yoga and sannyasa speak about death and dying.

Sannyasins actually perform their last rites on the day they take sannyasa. According to tradition, they are supposed to die a total death before they actually become sannyasins. Similar to an ordinary person, they perform all the rites of death, the different ceremonies and poojas, the feeding of people, and the period of mourning, before they actually take sannyasa. For such people death has no meaning, because mentally and emotionally they are supposed to be dead already. They start out on a new life where the attitude of *vairagya* or non-attachment, is developed.

Yoga also speaks of death, philosophically, in different yogic texts including the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali where death is seen as a transition from one life to the next. This transition has to be made in a positive way and not with a fearful, insecure state of mind. One's mind should be firm and stable at the time of death. In order to attain this tranquil and balanced state of mind, one has to go through the practices of pratyahara and dharana before actually encountering the death experience.

Different books have outlined what kind of preparation should be done in the way of meditation practices, so at the time of death we can be free from attachments, likes and dislikes, and with a centred, focused awareness pass on to the next life.

What can a yoga teacher do to keep the ego down?

There is no practice, no asana, no pranayama to keep the ego down, but one thing can help, and that is constant awareness. Awareness is the meaning of yoga. In the esoteric side of yoga, apart from the physical practices of asana, pranayama and other things, one is required to be aware of how one is reacting.

There are three very important concepts in yoga. The first is living in the present. The second is constantly observing the results of our actions. The third is developing immunity from the influences of cause and effect. If you follow these three concepts in the practice of esoteric yoga, you can say you have made it. You have kept the ego down, because the ego is the last force in our personality. The ego is the seed. Due to the ego we have ambitions, aspirations, desires, likes and dislikes, pleasure and suffering.

Esoteric yoga works at the level of the ego through awareness, observation of reactions, and immunity. When you are able to introduce these three elements into your daily life you will find that many of the normal events which excite or depress you, which give you a feeling of satisfaction or suffering, fulfilment, contentment and recognition of the worldly nature can be altered.

Pride is involved if one is getting good results; however, pride represents attachment to one's actions and feeling good about having done them. If you can develop immunity from pride through awareness, you will feel a very sattwic and positive transformation taking place in your life. In other words, life will become simple, not complicated. This is the indication you have overcome pride.

How can we decide which meditation practice or technique will be the most useful for us?

Many people have been practising meditation for so many years, but how many of them have actually come to understand the state of meditation? Very few. Although we may say we are practising meditation, we are actually contemplating a pleasant experience we wish to have. If an unpleasant experience interferes we immediately change our meditation practice because we feel the present practice does not suit us. This approach towards meditation goes against the basic principles of human psychology.

If ten parts of your mind contain positive experiences, then ninety parts contain the negative ones. It is not an

even fifty-fifty. Negativity in yogic psychology is seen as a resistance to change, and that controls about ninety percent of our nature. In the normal practice of our meditation we are only trying to feel good, joyful and happy. If people meditate and say, “Oh, during my first meditation I was so elated, my body felt light, I was one-pointed, I experienced so much peace, it is just the right meditation for me.” I tend to tell them that they are barking up the wrong tree.

Yoga has come up with a very firm rule about meditation. It states specifically in ashtanga yoga to perfect pratyahara. Only then can you move on to dharana, not before. Perfection of dharana then leads to meditation, *dhyana*. The perfection of the three is known as *sanyam* in the language of the *Yoga Sutras*, and ultimately leads to samadhi. When we look at meditation in this context, choosing a meditation practice is very much restricted in yoga. You work with one level of your mind and nature, know it, harmonize it, develop immunity to it, and only then move on to the next level.

Pratyahara is a very systematic path. In pratyahara the general theory is that one is made to observe the sensory interactions, the performance of the karmendriyas: the movement of the body, the natural activities of the body including defecating. We observe the sensations that we receive by means of the skin, the experiences of taste, smell, sound and vision to see if they are creating any kind of disturbance in the natural harmony, and if so, rectify it and develop immunity from it. Next, we work with the jnanendriyas in the same way. We develop immunity from their normal activity so that the functions of the body and mind continue normally, yet we are immune from them. We move to a higher level, and if we go through this process, the entire physical, pranic and mental activities will be known and we can deal with them without any difficulty. Then we can move into dharana. In dhyana there should not be any need to work with the mind. It is only a matter of awakening the anandamaya kosha. If you practise meditation or real dhyana then there should not be any need to work with

the mind at all. As long as we are working with the mind, being attracted towards pleasant experiences, rejecting unwanted, negative experiences, we have to work at the level of pratyahara and dharana. Therefore, meditation is a very difficult thing to practise according to yoga.

What is the difference between a yoga centre, a yoga school and an ashram?

Many people do not see the difference, but there is a definite distinction between these three. I have classified the difference between a yoga centre, yoga school and an ashram in the following way. Yoga centres are run by yoga teachers who have training in yoga, and who devote either part or all of their time to yoga. Yoga schools are places where not only the basic practices, but also the advanced aspects of yoga, are studied and practised. A householder or a sannyasin can manage them.

An ashram is a place where a specific tradition or lineage exists and it is this aspect which makes the ashram different from either a yoga centre or a school. Let me give you an example. Our own ashram is officially known as the Bihar School of Yoga. It is not actually called a yoga ashram. We can call it an ashram also, but the official aim and direction of the place is to carry out proper research into yoga, extract different yoga practices from the tradition, convert them into modern language for better understanding, and then propagate them. This is a process that keeps on changing and evolving.

Right now we are going through a process of change and evolution in the structure of the Bihar School of Yoga (BSY). It is dividing itself into two parts. One part is the academic aspect, which will carry on the aims and objectives of the Bihar School of Yoga in a deeper way, in the form of an institute for advanced studies in yoga. The other part is the ashram aspect of BSY where people can live and experience true ashram life. They will be able to go deep into their areas of personal sadhana and experience the yogic lifestyle,

because at present this facility does not exist at Ganga Darshan. The aim of this aspect is also to train those who are interested in the system of sannyasa, where one becomes part of a tradition or lineage.

These are the two parts and the different aims that differentiate an academic school from a spiritual ashram. Sannyasa is not a prerequisite. Sannyasa is not for people who have no sincere inner aspirations, not for those who just want to experiment with life, with yoga or even with spiritual life. Sannyasa is not for such people.

Sannyasa is also not necessary for those who are leading a social life. The tradition originally arose from the idea that one isolates oneself from society for a period of time, in order to bring about a positive creative change in one's lifestyle, understanding, attitudes, behaviour and thinking process. This change enables one to pass to a higher level of consciousness. To discipline one's nature requires a strong will. This training can only be given in an ashram environment, not an academic environment.

An ashram environment is created by the people who are part of the place. It is not just the preceptor or founder of the institution who contributes to it. Everyone who comes to the ashram contributes in their own way to create an environment where the tradition is respected, and also adapted to suit present-day needs.

Will there be certificate, diploma and degree courses conducted in Australia or any other countries? If so, when?

You are asking me about the future plans for Bihar Yoga Bharati (BYB), but you know my motto, 'God always has the last laugh'. There are very few times God laughs in life. One is when a doctor says to a patient, "Don't worry. I will save you." Another is when you sit down and start to tell all your plans to other people. Then God also laughs a big laugh. He says, "Make your plans, let's see what happens."

I do not want to make a laughing stock of myself, but let us just hope that God is not listening. There are plans in

mind that BYB will eventually have constituent colleges in different countries. Plans are already underway to have one in Germany, Italy and the UK. People are investigating the possibilities of having such colleges. If this happens, then many things that are taught here will be taught in those colleges too. It will facilitate the training of those people who have the will, but not the means, to come to India or who have social and marital commitments.

Concerning Australia, I will only say that you are well aware of the country's place in the heart of Sri Swamiji. In the mission of yoga, Australia is definitely a power centre. The yogic movement in Australia is going to go a long way. This has the blessing of Sri Swamiji too. The whole of Australia is going to come up in relation to yoga in a very strong, positive, creative and scientific way. In fact, Sri Swamiji has talked about his vision for Australia. Not only a constituent college, but also many other things are going to happen which will bring Australia and India very close together along the yogic path and raise it to spiritual heights. This was the gist of Sri Swamiji's message.

For the last eight years I have been able to maintain my daily sadhana of asana, pranayama and meditation, and it sustained me through many crises. Then I went through a period of several months when I felt very negative. I could not get up early in the morning and could not do the evening practices. How can I develop the discipline to do my sadhana, based on enjoying it, rather than forcing myself to do it?

You have the same problem as me. Everyone I have seen, including myself, goes through different changes. Periods come up every month or year when we are 'off' for a few days. Sometimes it becomes difficult to start anything for months. To be very truthful, I have not found a solution to it, but I feel that one should have faith and conviction in whatever sadhana one practises. Whether it is a combination of asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, kriya, relaxation,

mantra and meditation, or only one thing like dynamic asanas every morning – stretch the body left, stretch the body right, twist, slim your waist and feel happy that you are fit – that faith should be there.

In sadhana, there should be constant awareness that what you are doing is right. That conviction should not change for any reason. Conviction is the firm belief that the sadhana is helping you, that there is a positive habit in your life, just as there are negative habits like gossiping, spreading rumours or back-biting. Only if you have a firm conviction will there be completeness in your sadhana. There may come a time when you do not do any sadhana for months, but at the same time maintain the same spirit you had while doing the sadhana: live it, experience it. This has been my experience and that is why I am telling you this.

The depression that comes with a mood, the knowledge that while you were doing your sadhana you were feeling very well, and that now you are feeling lazy and cannot do it, is a common experience. Knowing that you should do it, but not being able to put your mind to it is a common experience. Instead of falling into that kind of thoughtful depression, simply try to maintain the feeling you were getting while you were performing your sadhana. If you are able to live it, experience it, be it, then the physical performance can be missed, but it will not affect the mind.

If you are not able to live it, the firmness of the mind dissipates, the mind falls back to its inner instinctive nature, which is to jump from one thing to another in search of pleasure, enjoyment, satisfaction and fulfilment at a superficial, mundane level.

It is said that everyone is afraid of death. I do not experience this. I wonder if the fear is being deeply suppressed or if I really have accepted my own death?

A question like that cannot have an answer. How can we analyze the instinctive level of consciousness? It is a matter of analyzing and observing our own nature, of meditating,

contemplating, going through the different areas of our mental awareness. For example, we can view the areas of our emotional attachments, “I love my parents”, “I love my friends”, “I love my house”, “I love my life”, and ask ourselves, “Will I be sad if I’m suddenly dead? If I am not here any longer will I miss it?” At the time of death there is going to be a complete disconnection from the things we now hold dear in life and to which we are intimately attached. That intimate attachment is very deep inside our personality. We cannot rationalize it. It is so deep that in the seed form it has taken the shape of the instinct for survival. When that instinct arises at the time of death, it is very painful and difficult to face. You may go through the process of detachment intellectually. You may think about death philosophically and logically, but by thinking about it, can you change the nature of that primordial instinct for survival?

I feel your fear is suppressed, because the moment the innate fear of death is released, I am one hundred percent sure one becomes immortal. Immortal in the sense of letting go of the fear of dying and realizing that existence is one evolutionary process from body to body, life after life; the same consciousness continuing in different forms and shapes, not immortal in the sense of the preservation of the body. Your fear of death must be suppressed because, although you may not experience it intellectually, deep inside that survival instinct still lives on.

When a chakra opens before we are prepared for the effect, should we continue with the practice we are doing?

No, stop the practice, and analyze the experience to see what has happened. Observe how you are reacting to it before the effect of the technique takes strong roots in your personality. The moment you see some change within you, stop and see where the disturbance has been created. Find out if the disturbance is at the pranic, mental or physical level and try to balance it with the help of other techniques. This is what

I suggest to many people because at times, due to over-enthusiasm, some people tend to go very deep, very fast. They therefore, miss many important points which could help them manage their initial kundalini awakening.

One lady came to me who had been practising yoga for many years. When she went to the supermarket, she would suddenly yell and everyone would freeze, thinking it was some kind of hold up. While walking on the road she would suddenly bend over and start walking crooked. The swami who had been teaching her in Australia said how embarrassing it was to be seen with her. Such things happen due to an intensive pranic awakening in the body. I suggested she stop all the practices she was doing for kundalini awakening and concentrate only on pawanmuktasana for a few months. This would enable the pranic meridians in her body to be cleared of any blockages, and the chakras would be balanced by the distribution of the prana. The pranas would stop accumulating and exploding suddenly.

Pawanmuktasana and very basic yoga practices like nadi shodhana without retention should be done. One needs to start off from the basics again so that the body can realign itself with the new experience. If you feel that you are not prepared for the effects of the chakra opening, then it is premature.

If your kundalini has risen in the wrong way and caused a mental disturbance, is it possible to cure yourself without the help of a teacher?

No, I do not think it is possible to cure oneself or manage oneself, without the help of a teacher. A teacher has to be well-versed in observing the mental states of the practitioner. Once we move into an altered mental state where the emotions, concept of rationality, expressions, thinking and the desires are different, it becomes very difficult to know what is real and what is not.

I do not think it is correct to say there is a wrong way for kundalini to rise, although Gopi Krishna has described

encountering many psychic disturbances in his awakening of kundalini along the ida passage. Rather than the kundalini going the wrong way, I think the mental disturbance is due to the nature of the person in whom the kundalini is awakening. Tantra also speaks of the mental structure of the aspirant and his ability to handle the awakening of kundalini.

There are some people, for instance, who are on the instinctive level of consciousness. The tantric term for this is *pashu bhava*, animal instinct or mentality. The awakening of kundalini will definitely create a change in them, and they may not function and relate in the normal way. The intermediate level of consciousness is known as *veera bhava* in tantra, the attitude or mentality of a warrior. The highest level is *divya bhava*, the level of one who is spiritually evolved, one who has developed some divine qualities.

Gopi Krishna's mental structure was disturbed. He lost touch with the normal concept of reality in relation to what he was doing, where he was working, his family and friends. He felt the basic instinct of fear, uncertainty, instability and insecurity. So he said, "My kundalini is creating a disturbing effect on my mind. It has gone up the wrong way. I have to pacify it. I have to try and awaken it from the pingala side." Pingala only represents where the energy is manifesting in a concrete definite form, such as through art, music or literature, an external expression.

The ida path is the mental process: thinking and thinking and thinking, and not getting anywhere or creating anything. Many emotions, thoughts, ideas and desires come up. Some are realistic, some are unrealistic, some are fantasy; however, there is no awareness of what actually needs to be done. That is the ida path, which Gopi Krishna experienced.

There are four basic human instincts. The first is the desire for sensual and sexual satisfaction, which we have had from the time we separated from God. This manifests when kundalini awakens in mooladhara. The second is the sense of fear: insecurity, loss of identity, inability to connect with reality. This manifests when kundalini is passing through

swadhisthana. The third is craving for food, eating and eating and eating, this manifests when kundalini is crossing manipura. The fourth is the desire to sleep. One can sleep for hours and hours and still feel sleepy and tired. This manifests when kundalini is passing through anahata.

These are the four basic instincts and they change. Once they change, whichever one was predominant in our life will manifest in a very tamasic and detrimental way. Fear and sleep are related with the mind. Food and sex are related with the body. Two relate with the manifest body and two relate with the subtle mind. Due to the change in the emotional and rational structure, the structure of performance, behaviour and thought, these instincts sometimes come up. Gopi Krishna confronted his instinct of fear. Baba Muktananda encountered difficulties with the sexual urge, and Kumbha Karana, also a great yogi, had difficulties with his sleep. According to the story he would sleep for six months and be up for one day.

Therefore, it is always best to have the guidance of a guru who can monitor your altered mental condition and adjust your sadhana accordingly.

Please tell us about the experience you had in Kali Temple, Calcutta.

I temporarily retired from the institutional work of Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) in 1994. Just as Sri Swamiji's life runs in cycles of twenty years, mine has cycles of eleven years. Sri Swamiji was born in 1923, joined Swami Sivananda in 1943, started his work in 1963, and left everything in 1983. We have to wait until 2003 to see what happens in the next cycle.

I was born in 1960. In my eleventh year I left India and went to Europe, Ireland and England. That was the start of my work and learning outside my own culture. When I came back to India to take over BSY, I was twenty-two years old. After the Tyaga Golden Jubilee convention in 1993, at the age of thirty-three, I resigned from BSY. It all happened naturally, without any planning. The sankalpa I took then

was that for the next eleven years I would travel for the propagation of yoga, not for the institution of BSY, but for the propagation of yoga in general. In 1994, I started travelling. Before that I never travelled, I was fixed here.

A swami's retirement is not according to age, as is the case in society. In sannyasa, retirement is not dependent on age, but rather on the fulfilment of ambitions, aspirations and desires. That is also one of the indications of a person who practises sadhana.

How do you know you are progressing in spiritual life? Many people ask that question. One of the indications is that naturally and spontaneously personal motivations, ambitions and desires become less, and a sense of duty arises. It is that sense of duty that does not allow you to disconnect from the world.

On 11th January 1995, when I had completed twenty-five years of sannyasa, I went to the Kali Temple in Calcutta where I had a very powerful experience. The result of that experience was that I felt absolutely empty, void, nothing, as if the Swami Niranjan that used to exist was dead.

It took me months to ground myself again. It was not just a momentary experience. Of course, people in the ashram noticed. I became totally disinterested in everything, avoiding people and work. Externally it was like a depression, but it was not a depression. It was just a feeling of having nothing to do any more. Everything was done. However, I also noticed that something was generating inside my head, as if some new programming was being made by some higher power or the guru.

If you ask me personally what I feel about this, I would say that before the 11th of January this year I was a person who had aspirations, ambitions, desires to do something for my guru, for other people, for yoga and for the ashram, but after that day I could not locate any desire or ambition. I am not saying that this makes me great; please do not take it that way. It is not a symptom of greatness. I am only trying to tell you that if one is dedicated and devoted internally

and externally, certain things will drop away naturally and spontaneously at the right time.

The new programming which came to my head was to continue to do the same work, but without any personal interest, just with the attitude of service. That changed my whole way of performing, behaving and thinking. It took me four or five months to ground myself back to a level where I could function properly. I would not attempt to interpret what all this means in relation to spiritual life; however, from what I have heard Sri Swamiji say at different times, I can only infer that one of the indications of growth and progress in spiritual life is the reduction of ambitions and desires.

If you feel your personal aspirations are increasing, you can be sure something is not right. There is a broken connection in your spiritual life or maybe even a short circuit. The disconnection is not the total stoppage of every activity; rather it is only a disconnection of your personal, subjective intellectual and emotional involvement. After that disconnection is repaired, a sense of commitment, duty and service dawns. Once that feeling is awakened, you will be able to enjoy even the most difficult situations and not wish to try to escape from them. You can live in the most conflicting situations without going through head-trips and saying, “Oh, I want a sabbatical leave. This is too much to handle!” because at that time you realize you are not the doer, you are only the medium through which something is happening.

The prayer by Saint Francis of Assisi, “Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace”, is not only a prayer, it can become a reality, although maybe not specifically in relation to peace. There are many things for which God can make us an instrument. Peace is only one thing. Maybe God can express wisdom or a particular quality through someone. Maybe he can express compassion and love, or a way of life through someone, or even a change in the social or financial structure of a nation. Why do we have to think that if we are in tune with God only peace or love will be expressed? No,

that is not correct. There are a million and one things that can be expressed by God, according to the need of society, the individual, the nation and the world.

Sometimes God may give us a book, sometimes a teaching, sometimes a message, a reform or a drastic and dramatic change. What the will of God is, nobody knows. Do not think that peace or compassion are the only expressions of a godly nature. Just try to make your life a rich one, a happy one, a complete one, so that you can say when you die, "I have nothing to regret and I am happy." Otherwise, it is very difficult to die full of regrets, "Oh! I missed this opportunity, I missed that opportunity."

Always remember, there are practical problems everywhere in life. Even if you are trying to do service, you will find practical problems. Some people will demand more, some people will demand this, and some people will demand that. Even if you are trying to give your love to others, you will find practical difficulties like jealousy and possessiveness. If you are trying to be compassionate to other people you will have practical difficulties. The mind and external conditions will create the difficulty.

What is dharma?

Dharma is the right use of common sense. It represents how you understand and perceive people, the environment and the world around you, and how you interact with them in the best possible way.

There are only four kinds of action in life: one, those which lead to emancipation or *moksha*; two, those which lead to right conduct or *dharma*; three, those which lead to the fulfilment of desires or *kama*; and four, those which lead to the attainment or security or *artha*.

It makes no difference if you are a householder or a sannyasin, even a renunciate has to fulfil the four karmas. When we talk of *artha* or security, whether social or financial, a householder has to go to the factory or office to earn money to sustain the family. Similarly, a renunciate has to

work, even if it is gathering friends or communicating with other people to obtain alms.

Proper interaction is an action related to artha, the attainment of security. If you are living in a forest and you go to a village to beg, like Buddha used to do with his disciples, then there is interaction with people. If the people do not like you they will not give you anything. Will you be secure then? If people accept you, like you, and give you alms it means you have developed a rapport with them. You are secure in the respect that you do not have to go hungry for days and months. You have security for the nourishment of body, mind and emotions.

Some people have a negative mind, so the drive for security becomes a negative effort. Some people have a positive mind, so the drive for security becomes a positive effort. If you are positive there will be compassion in your action. If you are negative there will be selfish manipulation, but the action is the same. It is not the action that is important; it is the attitude with which you perform the action. Both a renunciate and a householder have desires. A renunciate has to fulfil his desires in one way and a householder in another.

Therefore, dharma is actually the application of common sense in a constructive, positive and useful way. It represents your connection and your relationship with the people around you, the world, God and the universe.

Can you tell us about the propagation of yoga today?

There are many forms of yoga in the world: however, there have been very few propagators of yoga. The main stream of yoga in the present century has actually flowed through Swami Sivananda. Swami Sivananda, our paramguru, combined the essence of Vedanta and the practices of yoga and made them available to society. Later on, different masters of yoga like Deshika Acharya from South India, and Iyengar, who is well known all over the world for his physical yoga, came into the picture. Scientific investigations into the

principles of yoga were also undertaken at Kaivalyadham in Lonavala and Vivekananda Yoga Kendra in the South.

If you look at the people who have formed the backbone for the propagation of yoga, you will find that the majority of them have been disciples of Swami Sivananda: Swami Satchidananda, Swami Venkateshananda, Swami Jyotirmayananda and Swami Satyananda. Without any contention, the credit for the propagation of yoga in the world today belongs to the tradition of Swami Sivananda.

In India there are only four ashrams which are recognized by the government of India as centres of learning where yoga training is imparted: Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, in the north; Kaivalyadham, Lonavala, founded by Swami Kuvalyananda, in the west; Vivekananda Kendra, which is at present being managed by Dr Nagendra, in the south; and the Bihar School of Yoga (BSY), in the east.

Surprisingly enough, the yoga teachers at the Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh are BSY sannyasins. Dr Nagendra first learned yoga at BSY and follows the BSY system. The system developed by Swami Satyananda has been widely accepted in this country, because it incorporates all aspects of the personality, not only meditation or asana.

People who have worked with Satyananda Yoga for a very long time have gained a lot of repute and respect in different countries and have stood alone against the changes in the realm of yoga. For example, one of our swamis has been teaching yoga in London for the last twenty-five years. Today, the English Federation of Yoga, a very powerful organization known as the British Wheel of Yoga, gives due respect to her teaching because she has been following one system, one tradition, and is an expert in it. They often ask advice from her and send different people to her for guidance. If we can stick to one system of teaching and excel in it, everyone recognizes it as an offshoot of a tradition. This is very important.

Sometimes, in order to develop our own business, we tend to deviate from our aim by incorporating many other irrelevant things. I have come across people who teach yoga,

primal therapy, rebirthing, the Feldenkrais method, crystal therapy and about thirty other things. We are not against this, but you cannot excel in any method if you adopt so many systems. Choose one path and go for it, but do not mix and mess it up. Sri Swamiji always used to tell us that to find water, it is better to dig one hole fifty feet deep than to dig fifty holes that are only one foot deep. You will not find water in a hole that is one foot deep, but there is a great possibility of finding water in a hole that is fifty feet deep.

In this coming century the demand for yoga is definitely going to increase, and because we are unable to fulfil the demand for trained people, many people are going to experiment with only one thing. For example, rebirthing is only a technique of pranayama; Transcendental Meditation is only a technique of ajapa japa, part of pratyahara; vipassana is only a technique of antar mouna, and also only a part of pratyahara. We are not able to present the total picture to people who are in need of help due to a lack understanding and many deviations are going to occur. As yoga teachers it is our duty and responsibility to present a system to humanity which may not be the ultimate, but which is all-encompassing and complete. It is for this reason that Bihar Yoga Bharati (BYB) was established; to give us the opportunity of carrying out research into the ancient traditions and literatures, and presenting the ancient knowledge in modern language to promote the growth and development of people throughout the world.

It is also my wish that we create an association, a fellowship of Satyananda yoga teachers, and a global network of Satyananda yoga teachers. It should be a fellowship, not a federation or association. In this network we will be able to interact and disseminate information related to yoga in a better, more efficient manner. New developments in the application of yoga are definitely going to come up in the next few decades and we have to know how to apply yoga.

I have always believed it is not important to learn new things all the time. What is important is the application of

what we already know. If we cannot apply it in our life, the knowledge is of no use. It is meaningless. It is the application of the different systems of yoga that will be the thread connecting the network of the fellowship of Satyananda yoga teachers.

Receiving a certificate from Satyananda Ashram, Italy, or from the BSY, Munger, is not enough. It is only a piece of paper which authorizes you to teach the basic principles of yoga. Interaction, communication, exchange of ideas and experiences, and the dissemination of information which comes through BYB will ultimately be very important, especially if we are to present yoga in the spirit of *seva*, service and *karuna*, compassion. That is what I would wish every yoga teacher to remember.

How is the spiritual name chosen and what does it represent?

I cannot tell you how it is selected because it is a trade secret. Regarding what it represents, there is an essential quality in everyone which is recognized by the guru. That quality represents what we should aspire to attain in this lifetime for our spiritual evolution, in order to realize our inner potential.

Once, names not only identified a person socially, but also conveyed information about their level of evolution. They indicated the sadhana or effort of an individual to realize his or her nature, so they were symbolic and were selected according to the zodiac. In the jyotisha there are ways of finding names for people. In today's tradition we can give any name we like to our children, but the selection of a name is actually a science to indicate one's true nature. These days, our body is recognized by a social name. Just as our body, and we as individuals are recognized by a name, our spiritual nature should also be recognized by us and others who share and support our aspirations and spiritual views. In this way our psychic development can go on along with our external life. The name given to a spiritual aspirant

indicates the nature or quality to be cultivated in the course of their sadhana. It is an aim to achieve.

What is the difference between mahaprana and prakriti?

What is the difference between space and air? Air can be called a subtle manifestation of space. Air is the manifestation of the element of space and in the same way prakriti is the manifestation of mahaprana.

Prakriti is the total potential of creation. Mahaprana is the agent responsible for the manifestation of prakriti, in her millions and billions of forms, in the mineral, vegetable, animal and human kingdoms, and the universe with its stars, planets, and so forth. In fact, everything we observe in the known universe is a manifestation of prakriti. That is the main difference between mahaprana and prakriti.

I understand there are two sets of chakras below mooladhara. Can they be invoked directly to increase awareness and flexibility of the hips, knees and ankle joints and for healing those joints?

The chakras below mooladhara are situated in different parts and organs of the body and deal with lower life forms. Mooladhara and the chakras above it affect the human dimension of our existence directly. Our body in total: the physical, gross, mental, subtle, spiritual, and causal aspects are variously affected by the functioning of mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, bindu and sahasrara. The different parts of the body respond to the awakening of these different chakras because each chakra controls a specific part or organ of the body.

Therefore, the yogic tradition has maintained that it is not necessary to awaken the lower chakras because they no longer have any control over the organs of the body. It is the chakras in the higher centres beyond sahasrara which are in the process of activation and which at present control all the different parts, organs and functions of the body. Thus, yoga does not encourage the awakening of the lower chakras.

How do you deal with casteism when you work in the villages?

In the villages there is no casteism. Casteism is only in the state capitals, the metropolitan industrial cities, the commercial areas. It is not found in the villages.

I can give you one example of this. Near Rikhia there is a small village where different communities live. A few years ago we went there and asked them, “How do people of different castes, beliefs and religions live in this village without any fighting or discord?” They replied, “Swamiji, we don’t know what we are. We have been labelled by the survey department as being followers of this and that, a Muslim, a Brahmin, a Jain, but that is only on paper. In this community we don’t really know what we are. We only realize that we belong to a caste when the administrators come to our village. For us the most important thing is to live harmoniously together, till our land and get some produce to sell in the market to support our families. That is our dharma and we follow that.”

I think this example clearly shows that casteism does not really exist in the mind of people in rural India, because they do not have the time to think about such things. They are far too concerned with maintaining themselves and their families, because they are deprived of many of the resources which we take for granted. It is only people who enjoy different types of conveniences and who do not have to work hard for their survival who put themselves in different categories and classes. It is not characteristic of rural civilization, or rural society. It is the industrial society, the political clan, the opportunists who make such caste distinctions, not the village people.

Please discuss ways of cutting the roots of attachment as symbolized by the pipal tree?

We do not have the capacity to adopt a middle path. The natural process is that we become attached to many things throughout life: friends, wealth, status, name and

recognition, to name a few. This attachment is natural because it aims at boosting our self-image and self-esteem, and helps to give us a feeling of security and satisfaction. When we think about overcoming attachment we generally think in terms of severing it completely, becoming completely detached. That is something many people think about, but no one has been able to do because severing our attachments is a very drastic action.

In Sanskrit there are two words: *raga*, attachment, and *vairagya*, detachment. People only think in terms of these two, but there is another word, *anuraga* which means the middle way. Anuraga is variously translated as affection, love, passion, attachment. It is a deep feeling which involves the development of certain qualities by following the yamas and niyamas. If you try to cultivate certain qualities which can improve your own condition and situation, you can begin to experience detachment in a very natural way. There is no effort involved in *vairagya*. As easily as you experience *raga*, you can experience *vairagya*, provided you follow the middle path of *anuraga*.

If you begin to work on yourself and understand the concept of the yamas and niyamas and practise them in your day-to-day existence, rather than just having an intellectual concept of them, you can overcome your attachments. Through the development of those qualities you will come to a stage where mundane attractions and selfish motivations have no meaning at all. With this new perception you can begin to live in a healthier and happier way.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna talks about destroying the tree of attachment. He describes a very important method or technique for cutting this tree. That method is *anasakti bhava*, non-attachment. In life we are in the company of *raga*, negative attachments and attractions, and we try to get away from their negative influence on our personality. However, when these attachments become positive we experience *anuraga*. Then after we have transcended the positive attachments also, we experience *vairagya*.

How did yogis come to know about the five pranas and how were they named?

When we talk about yogis we are not talking about people who practise yoga one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. Yogis are people who live yoga. They are not practitioners of yoga, but living examples of yoga. Such people have the ability to perceive many things which would not ordinarily be possible. It is due to such people that we are accepting yoga today, and science is validating their discoveries.

The yogis were endowed with special faculties: a heightened self-perception, the ability to experience sleep consciously and to control the functions of the body without any effort. Such people had a highly evolved inner sight known as the third eye or *divya drishti*, divine sight. With this inner sight they were able to perceive the functioning of energies in visible nature and also their essence or pure form in the unmanifest dimension.

How does a scientist come to a conclusion? By linking different observations together and experimenting. In the same way, the yogis came to an understanding of the pranas by linking the observations and experiences of practitioners including themselves, and also through experiments while in that heightened state of yoga.

The pranas are named according to their function and the areas of the body which they control. For example, let us look at the five pranas. The first form of prana is situated in the thoracic region and the yogis say that it is an upward-moving force. It is necessary physically to keep the body alive; mentally to elevate the mind from the lower instinctive, sensual levels of consciousness; and spiritually to aid the process of sublimating human consciousness.

If you study kundalini yoga, you will learn that when kundalini awakens there is always the possibility of it returning to the state of dormancy. Kundalini can come up to swadhisthana or manipura and go back to sleep in mooladhara once more. Only after kundalini crosses

manipura is there no possibility of regression. When it passes manipura it enters the thoracic region of prana and the force of prana carries kundalini up and does not allow it to descend back to mooladhara again.

Once kundalini has gained momentum by moving up from manipura to anahata and then to vishuddhi, the passage from vishuddhi to ajna is very quick. It may take years to bring kundalini from manipura up to anahata. It may take months for kundalini to move from anahata up to vishuddhi. However, it will be only a matter of weeks for kundalini to go from vishuddhi up to ajna, and just a matter of days to travel from ajna to sahasrara. As soon as kundalini reaches the thoracic region of prana, its ascent gains momentum, and that is one of the functions of prana.

The second form of prana is apana, the force which controls the grosser senses of reproduction, sexual instinct, fear and expulsion of waste matter from the body. These are considered to be expressions of the downward-moving prana, representing worldly creation and the continuity of life.

The third form of prana is samana. *Sam* means equal. Samana is identified with the process of sustenance, providing nourishment and energy to the body, motivation to the mind and a sense of fulfilment and contentment to the human spirit. That is the function of samana. Samana acts as a link between the subtle and gross manifestations of energy.

The fourth form of prana is udana. One of the meanings of *udana* is to become active. Udana is responsible for the function of the karmendriyas; the movement of the hands and legs, and activity in the physical, mental and also spiritual sense.

The fifth form of prana is vyana which is all-pervasive. The meaning of *vyana* is all-pervasive or infinite. It is the aspect of prana which unites the individual pranas of the body with *maha prana* or cosmic energy. It connects localized prana with cosmic prana. The yogis have put a lot of effort into understanding the pranas.

How do we channel prana to different parts of the body?

In order to do this you have to perfect the practice of prana vidya, which teaches the process of wilfully directing energy, not only into different parts of your own body but into other bodies as well. Before that, however, you have to perfect pranayama and prana nidra. Then you move into the practice of prana vidya, and even here there are different stages of practice. First, you awaken and stimulate the pranas in the body. Second, you direct them to different parts of the body. Third, you use prana to heal yourself and others, either by direct touch or over a distance.

Prana vidya is not only a healing technique; it is the process of attaining absolute knowledge of prana. *Vidya* means knowledge. The advanced stages of prana vidya are not written down. They are only conveyed in the form of instructions from guru to disciple, and this absolute understanding of prana can lead to enlightenment. The knowledge of prana itself is considered to be an independent yogic science.

Prana is not a subject of raja or hatha yoga. It is an independent subject and a very important one, but in the absence of intuitive, true and sincere disciples, the gurus have never taught this science of prana completely to anyone. To simply make you aware of this subject they have made brief mention of it in raja and hatha yoga.

How can we observe the drashta?

You cannot observe the drashta, because that would mean that you become the drashta of the drashta, and if you become the drashta of the drashta then you are God almighty!

In the *Bhagavad Gita* there is a word *gudakesha* which means conqueror of sleep. Is sleep considered a hindrance in the path of sadhana? Please explain the term ‘conqueror of sleep’ in detail.

Sleep is one of the five vrittis, which are pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidra and smriti.

Pramana is cognition, *viparyaya* is wrong knowledge, *vikalpa* is confusion in colloquial language, *nidra* is sleep and *smriti* is memory. Sleep is a vritti which is both *klishta*, painful, and *aklishta*, painless; positive and negative; benevolent and malevolent. Sleep in the life of a sadhaka can become a hindrance, because it represents the absence of active consciousness. Being a vritti, sleep has to be mastered.

When people are nervous they may begin to smoke or put on weight. Once the bout of nervousness goes away the habits become normal. During the process of sadhana too, we sometimes encounter aspects of ourselves that we do not recognize consciously, but to which we react unconsciously. These reactions bring about feelings of insecurity and fear. In order to overcome insecurity and fear the sadhaka draws on the natural instincts of: *ahara*, food; *nidra*, sleep; *bhaya*, manifest fear, hiding from events and situations; and *maithuna*, increased sexual activity. Just by looking at a person you can identify what kind of tendencies they have.

Each of us has a very predominant instinct. Some people enjoy food; they gorge themselves at mealtimes and enjoy food to the extreme. There are some who wish they could sleep a few hours more in the day and are looking forward to sleep whenever they find an opportunity. They even sleep in class. This is a natural tendency. There are some people who are very shy, introverted. They have difficulty speaking and asserting themselves. They hide in their own shell, and are uncomfortable when they face situations or other people, even their family and friends. They weigh their words carefully and always worry that they may have said the wrong thing at the wrong time. This is a manifestation of *bhaya*, hiding, shying away. The same thing applies to sexual life. Sometimes an intense sexual urge can make one unbalanced.

Yoga is very clear about these instincts. It does not say that you will only see the beauty of life when you practise yoga. You will face your true personality and you have to be ready for that. You have to have *veera bhava*, the attitude of a warrior.

Tantra also says that. Tantra states there are three kinds of attitude. One is the attitude of an animal, another is the attitude of a warrior, and the third is the attitude of a divine being, *pashu bhava*, *veera bhava* and *divya bhava*, respectively. According to this concept the entire humanity is at the level of *pashu* or animal, the level of uncontrolled instincts. When we make an effort to control these instincts we become a warrior, and when we have mastered the instincts, we develop *divya bhava*. Yoga says the same thing. These vrittis can affect and alter the life of an individual to such an extent that they lead to downfall, or to such an extent that there is a progression. Instincts of such power have to be controlled and guided, and sleep is one of those instincts.

Krishna was rightly called Gudakesha. Sri Swamiji also deserves this name, because since I have known him I have never seen him sleep. He is always alert, every second. In the middle of the night he will know a fly crossed his bed at one o'clock in pitch darkness. He will know how many mosquitoes came near the mosquito net in the middle of the night: constantly and absolutely alert! Even when he was snoring and we thought he was asleep he was fully conscious. If we ever thought he was sleeping we were in big trouble. He never slept, no matter what time of the day or night.

In those days we could not understand Sri Swamiji's control over sleep, but today I am beginning to understand it. His lifestyle today reflects that. When he is doing his sadhana in Rikhia, I never see him sleep. He retires, but in that retirement there is isolation, a retreating, not sleep. There is tranquillity but not absence of the world. If somebody asked me, "What name would you give Sri Swamiji for having conquered sleep?" I would like to give him the name Gudakesha.

Can you say something about the personality of the African race as opposed to the Europeans?

In Africa, the people have a raw psyche. It is not suppressed by all the materialistic samskaras. In Europe and other

countries, people are very strong mentally, psychically and spiritually, but too many things have made them lose their sensitivity. They have to struggle against the influence of materialism and their lifestyle. In Africa, however, there is still that openness. It is not as heavily into materialism as Europe. The cities are of course growing and developing, but in general there is still a feeling of the wild nature, of the primitive and innocent. People who are aware of nature have a different kind of sensitivity and perception. Most of the Africans I have met, I would say ninety-nine percent, whether in America, England or other countries, have been very open, friendly and sincere. Africa is a different type of civilization, a group, a community where innocence still exists.

How can we use Vedanta constructively?

Due to lack of knowledge and understanding we are not able to use the system, concept, lifestyle and theories of Vedanta properly, so we do not get the right results. We have to look at this question from various angles.

The literal meaning of the word *Vedanta* is ‘end of knowledge’. What is the aim of Vedanta? To make one realize that an individual being is only a reflection of the divine being, or as Christ said, “I and my Father are one.” We should not only realize this intellectually, but live the spirit of it. This is the aim of Vedanta. To attain the state of mind where unity with nature and the cosmos is experienced and everything is seen as an extension of divine consciousness.

There has to be an acceptance and understanding of the different approaches which can lead to realization. The approaches to Vedanta are many. We can approach Vedanta as a bhakti yogi like Mirabai or as Ramanuja, Vallabhacharya, and Madhavacharya. Mirabai did not have an intellectual concept of Vedanta. She was a bhakti yogi. She was able to live the concepts of Vedanta spontaneously.

We can approach Vedanta with the intellect as did Shankaracharya, a jnana yogi. Shankaracharya approached Vedanta with total and pure logic. We can approach Vedanta the way Saint Tukaram did. Tukaram was from Maharashtra in western India. He was a very simple villager with a very ordinary profession who used to sing God's name. During a pilgrimage he was going from North to South India carrying water from Kailash to offer to the Shivalingam in Rameshwaram. There is a belief that if you can perform such a pilgrimage you accrue a lot of merit. Just before entry into the temple in Rameshwaram, he saw a donkey lying on the ground dying of thirst. Nobody was giving it any water. Tukaram thought, "No, I will not keep the water for the Shivalingam. I will offer it to the manifestation of Shiva I see in the donkey who needs the water", and he gave the water to the donkey. A person like Tukaram, a karma yogi, can attain Vedanta through his action.

Then there is a fourth path. We have covered the bhakti yogi, Mira, the jnana yogi, Shankaracharya, and the karma yogi, Tukaram. There is another method by which one can attain the aim of Vedanta, and that is through meditation, through the intensive sadhana of raja yoga. It depends on which path of Vedanta one is trying to live.

Vedanta is not only a philosophy; it is also a lifestyle, a way of action and feeling. Theologically speaking, reading a book on Vedanta will not give you enough understanding. One has to have the ability to change one's lifestyle according to the precepts. Only then does Vedanta have any meaning. Intellectually, one can have a philosophy but lead a totally different lifestyle. This is the case with the majority of people in the world today, no matter who or where they are.

There are basic differences between the actions we perform and the philosophy we adhere to. There are many differences; hence, an attempt has to be made to adjust and adapt to a spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual change. Only then will it be possible to use Vedanta constructively.

Swamiji, can you explain the deeper, inner aspect which underlies karma yoga?

Karma yoga can be called a science. Science evokes an image of someone involved in an external experiment, but there is another scientific process which is internal. It relates to the discovery, transformation and unfolding of human nature. Different spiritual paths and traditions, such as those of yoga, tantra or sannyasa, have utilized inner science as their main tool for working with themselves and society.

Karma yoga falls into the category of inner experimentation and sadhana. Due to our preconceived ideas, we see it externally as physical work, but karma yoga is not only limited to physical activity. Of course, physical activity plays a major role in occupying the attention and mind. If you are adept at holding your attention and mental activity, without allowing it to waver, then even that can become a practice of karma yoga.

Karmas have been described as subtle impressions in the field of consciousness. They can manifest externally through our interactions, behaviour, and self-image. Our karmas are the various impressions which come out in external life in the form of action.

When you add the word ‘yoga’ to make the term karma yoga, it means karma is performed with awareness, and not with the attitude of revulsion you have when you are forced to do something you do not enjoy and are struggling with. Another aspect of karma yoga is acceptance, “I am an instrument.” It makes no difference whether the work given is something menial or great. What makes the difference is the feeling that you are an instrument. Each increase in awareness as it dawns is part of the process of refinement of the human personality.

Karmas can manifest in the form of schizophrenia, hyperactivity, or understanding and caring for others. They can also manifest as a ruthless, uncaring hard nature, or in the form of a scatter-brain, not being able to grasp the reality of the present environment and jumping from one thing to

another. Whatever the state, they all reflect our karmas, our physical interaction or dimension: a dislike for work, a love for work, escaping from work, being fully involved head, heart, hands and soul in work. All these attitudes reflect our inner nature.

The impressions which manifest from the depth of our consciousness into our outer life are brought to our awareness by the process of karma yoga. Even if you dislike doing physical work, be aware of this dislike; however, do not just be aware, do not just remain at that level, try to transcend it. If you feel that harmonizing action through awareness is your aim in life, then you have to try to transcend feelings of like and dislike, and not get stuck in a feeling of, “Oh, I want to do this work” or “I dislike doing that work.”

There is a definite reason why we like or dislike something; however, we are not able to understand that reason, thus we simply react to any given situation. In karma yoga one has to become aware of the reasons. Afterwards, karma yoga simply becomes a matter of dharma. On a social level *dharma* is a sense of duty, commitment or obligation. On a spiritual and personal level it is your belief in your strengths and ability to adapt to any situation. It is developed awareness. It is the experience of harmony within yourself and in your interactions with others.

In karma yoga one more factor has to be watched and that is with regard to obsession and joy. Sometimes karma yoga can become an obsession. We tell other people to do something in a very strict and disciplined way which can be rude and rough. Other people react and then we react because of the other person's reaction. Karma yoga then becomes an obsessive action. It reflects an “I am better than thou” attitude, “I have identified myself with power and other people have to obey me no matter what.” That kind of obsession and hardness can develop if we are not careful.

The other side of the coin is doing karma yoga in a bouncy, joyful, happy way. It does not matter if you have to do a hundred types of work, do it in a playful and joyful way

without allowing it to become an obsession. When there is obsession there is anxiety, anger and frustration, but when there is joy it will inspire each and every one to come out from the shell of obsessive karma into the more playful area of karma yoga.

If one takes poorna sannyasa, is one totally committed to the ashram, or can one go back freely to worldly life if one has commitments?

This question does not only relate to poorna sannyasa, but more to the direction that the guru may give for the future life of the aspirant. When Sri Swamiji was given sannyasa, Swami Sivananda told him, “Wait and don’t attempt to do anything.” Sri Swamiji said, “What do you mean wait? I have been given sannyasa. Now I wish to live like a sannyasin in isolation, performing my sadhana, aspiring for the aim which has brought me to sannyasa.” Swami Sivananda replied, “No. I am giving you sannyasa, but you have to wait in order to move towards the aim and goal for which you took sannyasa.”

Sri Swamiji asked, “If I have to wait that long, why did you give me sannyasa now? Why didn’t you say, ‘No, I can’t give you sannyasa? Come back later on.’” Swami Sivananda said, “Because you have to exhaust your karmas and ambitions first. Only when you have exhausted your karmas and ambitions can you follow the path of sannyasa.” Sri Swamiji said, “Well, if I have to perform karma to exhaust my karmas I’ll go back to society.” Swami Sivananda replied, “No. Live in the ashram and finish your karmas here, because in society you accumulate karma. In ashram life, with the discipline and training, you exhaust your karmas very fast. Outside there is accumulation of karma, inside there is exhaustion of karma.”

It is very hard to find a person with the mentality and calibre of Sri Swamiji. He accepted in total the mandate of his guru, and he incorporated it into his life. If I were to say the same thing to the people here, they would leave the

ashram within a week, because it is extremely difficult to face their karmas; it takes a great deal of strength to exhaust their samskaras. Some people find it easier to accumulate samskaras and karmas.

Poorna sannyasa is a very difficult subject. It depends, not on initiation, but on following the mandate of the guru. If you feel you are capable and have the strength to follow that mandate then an attempt can be made; however, in the absence of that personal realization it is important that you work to develop your inner strength. To develop inner strength it is not necessary to become a sannyasin. Sannyasa is a process. Just as there is social evolution, in the same way there is spiritual evolution, and sannyasa is a process of maturing inwardly. Once you become mature internally and spiritually you can understand many things.

How can chronic pain be dealt with? Can it be used for spiritual development?

Generally, people are afraid of pain and reject it. Fear and rejection are the two important points here. During disease the body undergoes a crisis. I am using the term 'crisis' here to define a change in the state of the body and its performance. For example, if you are happy and joyous and you remain that way continually, is it only a mental state? No, because not only is the body affected by the sense of happiness, but there are also the hormonal secretions and chemical changes that take place due to it. You walk with more oomph in your step, you are more upright and sharp, and you radiate happiness. Even in happiness the body undergoes a change in the normal pattern relative to bodily systems and conditions. In happiness the crisis is positive and in disease it is negative.

When you are sick, the fear and rejection which you have inside also create chemical and hormonal changes in the body. These changes affect the nervous system, which in turn affects the pranic and mental systems. Therefore, in order to deal with chronic disease or pain, it is important to become aware of your fear and rejection of the pain and disease.

There is one disease for which no cure has yet been found and it is known as DIFS, Disease Induced Fear Syndrome. Cures are available for most forms of disease, but there is no cure whatsoever for DIFS. We get a simple lump and in our mind it becomes cancerous. Due to fear, certain hormones and chemicals are projected into that part which, over the course of time, makes it malignant. We fear the pain and it then intensifies and takes root there.

First, you have to remember that the mind and body work as one unit. Although the pain or disease is physical, the mind plays a very important role in its management. Therefore, it is necessary to learn meditation in order to go into the pain, to change the quality and the experience of the pain. The moment you are able to do that, the pain is gone.

It is the same with disease. Yogis have always maintained that disease is a condition of the mind and not the body. This is the basic thought behind the concept of yoga therapy. When we are afraid, we get caught up in a thought stream where we are continually thinking about our disease. Then, due to the secretion of physical chemicals and hormones, we become aware of the intensity of the disease. If we can simply divert our mind from the disease, and remain healthy in our mind, then any kind of pain or disease can be reduced or even eliminated.

As the practitioner, you will have to take steps to ensure your mind remains healthy and free from fear and rejection. For this purpose meditation plays a very important role, especially the techniques of pratyahara and dharana. These techniques allow one to focus, concentrate and change the mental experience, and once that happens, spiritual development and the management of disease become a natural process.

Many yogis who have taken on the karmas of other people have suffered from chronic diseases. Ramakrishna Paramahansa suffered from throat cancer. Swami Sivananda suffered from paralysis at the end of his life. Swami

Vivekananda suffered from diabetes. Many of the great saints have suffered from chronic diseases, but despite their ill health and diseased bodies, they were able to maintain a healthy mind. For them, disease never became a restrictive factor. They had the power to get rid of the disease; however, they realized the nature of the disease was not due to any physical problem. Rather, it was due to the karmas of different people which they were taking upon themselves so they did nothing to cure themselves.

Diseases occur for different reasons. Disease and pain can occur when there is some imbalance or error in our nature and lifestyle. In the life of a sannyasin diseases occur, not because of an imbalanced lifestyle, but due to the karmas. I do not mean that if you fall sick you have taken on the karmas of other people; rather, the management of different diseases changes from time to time according to the reason the person is suffering.

The biggest healer is not the doctor, it is you. If you have the right attitude, you will be able to manage the disease. If you have the wrong attitude, the disease will take you to your grave. It is up to you; you are the healer. If you can learn how to manage a negative crisis in your life you will definitely evolve spiritually. The spiritual path will contain crises, and it is a positive, not negative crisis, when you shed your old patterns, habits, hang-ups, thoughts and attitudes, and become open, receptive and free. Therefore, if you can simply change your mental attitude from negative to positive, you will develop spiritually.

Can you explain the phenomena of Ganesha drinking the milk?

When the statues of Ganesha started drinking milk, scientists around the world got together to see if they could explain what was happening. A group of British scientists made a very beautiful statement, “We don’t believe it is a miracle, yet we see it happening with our own eyes and we can’t deny it.” American scientists said something similar, “We can’t

understand this phenomenon; it requires investigation, but there is no denying that milk is disappearing.” Only the Indian scientists were confused!

I was in Deoghar to oversee the Sat Chandi Maha Yajna preparations and I asked Sri Swamiji about it. He said, “Whether it is a freak of nature or a miracle, a divine action, we don’t know, but things like this can happen and they only mean one thing: that the energy that is considered to be divine or godly is everywhere and in everything. For those people who are spiritual or God-fearing by nature, this should be a lesson.

“Whatever we may call God, whether it be Allah, Rama or Krishna, is an imposition of an idea in the form of a belief. God is not Allah or Rama or Krishna. It is just energy, and that energy can manifest in any form, in any way. When situations become right or are conducive, then it can happen in front of our own eyes and we may consider that to be a miracle. However, it is nothing but the interplay of cosmic energy, energy playing with itself. On the body of the ocean the waves play with each other, crash against each other, merge with each other, and go in different directions. Their actions are not uniform; some waves are small, some are big. In the same way, even in the cosmic dimension, energy has many roles and forms. When an unknown form of energy interacts with a known form of energy, what happens is known as a miracle.”

After this, Sri Swamiji was quiet, so I did not ask him any more, because I think we can understand and also accept that there are many more realities and energies which are unknown to us, unseen by us and unheard of by us. Humanity is never going to be able to discover all those forms of energy which are cosmic in nature. Science will only see the radiations and emissions of energy which have some physical form or component; however, what about the form of energy which has no physical component, which cannot be measured by any equipment? To say that science will eventually be able to discover the nature of the cosmos,

or the nature of God, is totally ridiculous. A human being will never invent an instrument capable of capturing the entire activity of the cosmos. Many things happen which are beyond our comprehension, so let us just accept that it has happened.

I heard a very beautiful rumour which came from Deoghar that on the night the statues of Ganesha drank milk, a very auspicious event occurred. An avatara was born.

This is a very interesting phenomenon. Whether it is cosmic or scientific, divine or human is irrelevant. Certain celestial signs have been seen, and extraordinary events have occurred at the time of birth of great men. There are people who believe this to be true and accept it as a divine sign. There are sceptics who see it but disregard it because they are in search of logical, scientific, physical explanations. There are also disbelievers who do not even think about it. The same thing happened when the statues of Ganesha drank milk. There were people who believed it, people who were sceptical about it, and people who disregarded it completely.

At the time of the birth of Christ, the celestial event was the Star of Bethlehem. Whether it was a fluke or predestined is a different matter, but it marked the important event of the birth of Christ. In the *Ramayana* it is said that when Rama was conceived, dry river beds overflowed with water, without rain falling; fruit trees bore fruit, and flowers bloomed out of season. This could have been a physical phenomenon; it could also have been cosmic, divine. At the time of Krishna's birth, there were prophecies, thunderstorms, rain, and yet all the constellations were in very proper and auspicious positions. When Buddha was born, lotuses bloomed in the rivers and other auspicious omens manifested.

Now we have the phenomenon of Ganesha drinking milk. Why does this not happen every day? Why did it only happen on one specific day? Why has it not happened before? People have been offering milk to Ganesha for

centuries. Mahatmas and yogis have always maintained that such signs and special events represent the coming of a much evolved soul in the form of an avatara or saint: it makes no difference which, but definitely a much evolved soul, who alone knows the purpose of his or her coming.

You get a different perspective of the world from higher up. What are the actual problems facing humanity? We may say there are social problems, wars, animosity, famine, corruption; however, we see all these things from our level. From a higher level there might be a different perspective.

We do not know what we are going to get from this great soul: a religion, a book, a social reformation? We do not know what is going to happen and it does not really matter. Sri Swamiji has said it will be good if that evolved person is born in India, because here we are tolerant of every kind of philosophy. If he takes birth in the West he might be crucified!

There is emphasis placed on the need for yoga in today's society. Was there no such need for yoga in the past and in the previous yugas?

Yoga is definitely a boon, a very special kind of gift for a society undergoing difficulties and having problems coping with the struggles of life. In every age our needs and aspirations change; our physical, social and psychological requirements change. Yoga has always played a very vital role in facilitating the transition from one stage of life to another, whether it was in the time of Rama, Krishna, Buddha or Mahavira.

Society has always been a modern society. Just because you can fly in a plane and your grandparents could not, does not mean that they were primitive. They were modern by their standards. Five thousand years ago people were modern by their standards. Ten thousand years ago, during the Copper Age or the Agrarian Age, after the Stone Age, people were modern by their standards. They also had to face the emotional, social and environmental struggles in

their minds. In order to cope with those struggles they came up with the system known as yoga, which has remained unchanged to this day.

Yoga is not a progressive science like physics or chemistry, it is a fixed science. There is no scope for changing either the theory or the practice. You can adapt the practices of pranayama, pratyahara and dharana to Satyananda style, Sivananda style, Iyengar style, Maharishi Yogi style or Rajneesh style; however, that does not change the basic practice of an asana. The final pose of mayurasana is always the peacock, no matter whether you move into it slowly and gently or with a jerk. It is only that we have to rediscover it or resurrect it from the ancient tradition. Being the only fixed science in the world, it has had a permanent place in human life and society.

There were times when yoga went underground. There were times when it received public acclaim and social acceptance. Whatever may have happened, yoga was always an already discovered path, tradition and science. People in the past went to the fullest extent possible to devise the yogic system, and they would not have done so if there had not been some need in their society. People would not have gone from the very basics of yoga to the heights of samadhi if there had been no need for it. So we are talking of an eternal need of humanity, in the past, in the present and in the future. The need to find a sense of balance, mental peace and inner tranquillity, this will only come through yoga, actively, objectively and subjectively also.

Can you talk about developing bhakti through bhajan and kirtan?

First of all you have to understand what bhakti is. It is not kirtan, bhajan, repeating your mantra with a mala, thinking about God and getting obsessed with an idea of being pure. Bhakti is a quality of mind which has to be nurtured.

We all have bhakti in one way or another. Believers have bhakti and non-believers have bhakti. Bhakti may not

necessarily be devotion. Bhakti is translated as devotion in English, but that is because there is no adequate word in English to describe it, and devotion comes closest. The word devotion has been understood in relation to a belief or idea, with believing in what we choose to believe. That might describe the word devotion, but bhakti is something different.

Bhakti is a quality or attitude of the mind in the same way as *lobha*, greed; *asakti*, attachment; *krodha*, anger; and *swartha*, self-interest are attitudes of the mind. Bhakti has nothing to do with compartmentalized beliefs of whether one is a Hindu, Christian or Muslim. Through the process of yoga we learn to develop and channel that aspect of our mind, which is known as bhakti, towards the experience of transcendental reality. In order to experience transcendental reality, we need the help of a form upon which to focus our attention. It can be the form of a saint, a deity, a guru, or an incarnation of God.

Normally, our mental energies, attention, inner wisdom and knowledge are directed to those things which help give a boost to our personality, lifestyle, image and nature. When we think of a person who we consider to be our enemy, we experience animosity. When we think of a person who has disturbed our harmony, we experience anger. When we think of sensual enjoyment, we experience passion. When we think of our lover, we experience love. Depending on where our mind is attached, a corresponding feeling arises. The process of channelling these energies toward the experience of transcendental reality via a medium, form or symbol, is known as *bhakti*.

How can we practise bhakti yoga? When we add the word 'yoga' to the word bhakti it implies that each and every aspect of our personality: the body, including the goose pimples, the mind, the feelings and emotions, must all vibrate at one frequency. Can our whole being vibrate at one frequency? According to yogis it can. The process is bhakti yoga. In order to nurture, develop and perfect bhakti,

different methods have been described: kirtan and bhajan being one of them, the repetition of mantra being another.

In the Vaishnava tradition, nine forms of bhakti have been defined. Three of these are thinking about God, chanting the name of God and listening to stories about God. Each of these emphasizes the merger between the physical, mental and spiritual feelings. When the body, including the voice, becomes tuned, then the external frequency leads to an experience of the internal frequency, the feeling, the emotion and the transformation of a thought that comes with it. All this leads to the development of a spiritual feeling which is not confined to one individual, but which is universal.

In order to train the physical body along with the senses, it is important to sing kirtan and bhajans. Whether you do it individually or as a group makes no difference. Just as the mind is trained through the process of pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and the internal body through the practice of asana, mudra, bandha and the shatkarmas; the senses have also to be tuned and trained through kirtan, through becoming aware of the intensity of a note, its pitch and frequency. Individual singing is good only when you are a perfect master of it. Until then, group singing is the prescribed way. Group kirtan develops the experience of that one vibration because kirtan implies that the body is in tune with the song, whereas bhajan implies that the mind is in tune with the song. This is the difference between kirtan and bhajan.

Kirtan and bhajan are not just short and long. Kirtan is not a two line song and bhajan a twenty line song. That is how we discriminate between kirtan and bhajan; however, the actual meaning behind the word *bhajan* is that the mind is perfectly in tune with the song. Your emotions, thoughts, feelings and whole expression, which are mental in nature, are vibrating in harmony with what is being sung. *Kirtan* is the attunement of the body.

Some people are qualified and capable of raising their own energies and do not need to be part of a group. Others

may not be capable or qualified, due to a lack of training, to experience that awakening of energy privately or individually. Kirtan leads to bhajan, and bhajan, when the mind is in tune, leads to *manana*, continuous awareness. Ultimately, *manana* leads to the merger of individual energy with cosmic energy, individual vibration with cosmic vibration.

What is the basic universal concept by which we can view life?

Having the good of others in mind as the basic universal concept with which to view life is the pronouncement of many enlightened beings: "Those who live for others truly live." However, this is one of the most difficult things to achieve in life.

What was the ambition of Saint Francis of Assisi? What was the desire of Jesus, Vivekananda and many other such people who have come in our midst from time to time? They had only one desire, to live for others, but of course they also had to undergo training to realize this desire fully.

In living for others you use the best of yourself. You express your knowledge creatively. The expression of your human qualities has to be balanced and harmonious. You must be able to feel compassion, affection, a sense of commitment and duty, and positivity. This is what we feel when we live for others. And what do we feel when we live for ourselves? Well, you can answer that for yourself.

You may say that this is all very well in theory but how do we practise it? This has been discussed in the *Yoga Sutras* (Samadhi Pada, sutra 33), which answers four very simple and basic rules in relation to *maitri*, friendliness; *karuna*, compassion; *mudita*, gladness; and *upeksha*, indifference; "In relation to happiness, misery, virtue and vice, by cultivating the attitude of friendliness, compassion, gladness and indifference respectfully, the mind becomes purified and peaceful."

One should be friendly to those who are happy, compassionate to those who are suffering and unhappy, glad for those

who are virtuous, and indifferent to those who are full of vice. Ignore the crooked people because they will still continue to bother you day in and day out. When their time comes, they will suffer and you will feel compassion towards them. And when you feel compassion towards them you will become their friend. This is the cycle. These are the four basic rules which interact with each other all the time. They are not isolated rules. If you can live these four rules of yoga, I am sure you will have a basic universal concept by which to view life.

Can you shed some light on creativity and love in relation to the transformation of the self? Could you tell us what is said in yoga about dream, intuition, and imagination, and their connection with consciousness?

I would add to creativity and love the concept of sublimation of one's normal nature. We are looking at this question from the viewpoint of yoga, not as a form of practice but as an attitude which needs to be developed in order to express one's potentials and qualities in a better way.

Sages have said that perfection in every action is yoga. It has been further stated by such enlightened people that the aim of every action performed by a human being, whether physical, mental or spiritual is that it be done for self-purification. The aim of all actions has to be to attain perfection and to transform the manifest sensorial and mundane qualities. Therefore, we are looking at two things: the concept of karma and the concept of purification.

The normal concept of karma concerns the activity being continually performed by the senses, mind, intellect and spirit. The actions which one performs through the body are influenced by circumstances, situations, events and other people. Actions performed by the spirit are more intuitive in nature and are not affected by situations, circumstances or people. Perfection in action and transformation through action has to occur in the manifest, not the spiritual dimension. We have to perfect the aspect of *kriya*, of dynamism, of performing an action.

For the perfecting of action, techniques are, first of all, meditation. One should meditate and develop the faculty of observation. After developing the faculty of observation one should attempt to regulate one's actions according to the concepts of justice and righteousness. This will lead to creativity and greater control over the unconscious activities of the manifest nature.

We experience the different polarities of attraction and repulsion, pleasure and pain, discomfort and ease, affection and jealousy, love and hatred; however, all these experiences are circumstantial. We experience love towards somebody because of the situation, the circumstances, the particular person involved, our feelings, intellect and emotions, which are all conditioned to observe and respond to things in a certain way. Real love is never experienced by anyone, neither is real hatred. Real affection is never experienced by anyone, neither is real jealousy. Real positivity is never experienced by anyone, neither is real negativity. Whatever we experience in our life is only circumstantial. When we connect with an object, idea, form or quality, whether abstract or concrete, manifest or unmanifest, does not matter, as we react with a conditioned mind.

If we look at the concepts of yoga, we will find that a lot of emphasis has been given to self-observation, "Become aware of what you do, of what you think, of how you act and interact. Become aware of how you live your life from moment to moment." Even this basic principle cannot be mastered by everyone because it is very difficult. In order to evolve, one quality which has to be developed is awareness of the moment, but how many people are actually successful at this? Our conditioned nature does not allow us to break away from the habit of swinging from one pole to another without any awareness whatsoever.

For example, all over the ashram we have a notice, 'Mouna from 6 pm to 6 am'. How many people actually follow it with determination? Very few. It is not just a rule. It is a method by which you can develop the faculty of

awareness, and it is also a sadhana. This is only one example of how we remain conditioned, even when we know the methods of overcoming a condition.

Therefore, I say that no one has experienced true love, true hatred or true creativity. It's all conditioned, circumstantial, and the more I look at everyone, the more I feel that nobody can experience their true nature, because the mentality of today does not allow it.

Systems, methods and techniques are available for attaining this experience but one has to be constant, one has to persevere. To experience or awaken any human quality, to attain any higher state of mind or consciousness, one has to be very persistent. It has been stated in the *Yoga Sutras* (Samadhi Pada, sutra 14) that in order to develop a solid foundation for any kind of growth and progress in yoga it is necessary to have the ability to continue your practice for a long period of time without interruption, and to maintain a feeling of reverence towards the practice. If you can do this, it will lead to an understanding of the concept of creativity and love.

At what stage does the prana or soul enter the foetus? Are the chakras already formed at this time? Can the mother influence the pranic body of the baby or is it an independent individual?

Prana and soul are two different things. Prana enters the foetus at the moment of conception and the soul enters later on, around the fourth month. The mother can influence not only the pranic body, but all the dimensions of the baby, and at the same time the baby retains its independence.

At the moment of conception, when the chromosomes are interacting with each other in the mother's body, there is a transfer of pranic energy from both the male and female bodies. These two aspects of pranic energy become one.

From the prana of the male, the body of the baby develops, and from the prana of the female, the baby's nature develops. I am not talking physiologically, but

according to tradition. Physiologically, you may say that the mother sustains and nurtures the baby for a certain period. She is definitely responsible for the growth and development of those chromosomes from a foetus to a baby; however, the basic ingredients for the formation of the body come from the pranic energy of the male. The basic ingredients for the formation of the baby's nature, the mind, emotions, concepts, ideas and feelings, come from the mother's prana. Therefore, although my body may look more like my father, my inner structure is that of my mother and you will also find a much closer affinity and link between mother and child than between father and child.

According to yoga, the soul enters the womb at the age of four months. A very peculiar experiment shows this may be right. I am not saying it has been proven, it is only speculation. This experiment was actually carried out for the purpose of observing the brain image, mapping the electrical activity of the brain. In one particular series of photographs, in which the brain of a woman who became pregnant during the experiment was observed, a very peculiar thing was noted. In the early days of pregnancy, no spot of light showed up in the central area of the skull of the mother, called the *brahmarandhra* in Sanskrit, the point where there is a small hole when the baby is born, which closes later, leaving a slight indentation. It only showed up around the fourth month of pregnancy. The series of photographs belonged to a woman who had been practising yoga for many years.

When I saw the photographs, heard they belonged to a pregnant woman, and because the light appeared during the fourth month, my first reaction was to say, "This is the soul of her baby entering her body." This supports the yogic theory. I am not saying that it is the ultimate proof, more research will have to be done, but it backs up the yogic theory.

The chakras are already formed by the fourth month of pregnancy when the soul enters, and you have to remember that the chakras are not physical; they are centres which

determine the characteristics of a human being. The karmas of the previous life manifest in each chakra as their characteristics.

The mother influences not only the pranic body, but the entire inner nature of the baby: the annamaya kosha, she maintains and nurtures in the womb with the help of the umbilical cord; the manomaya kosha, the ability to express mentally and emotionally comes from the mother; the pranamaya kosha, the level of dynamism the child expresses is received from the mother; Vijnanamaya kosha, contains the possibility of the child attaining a higher state of consciousness during his or her lifetime.

Nevertheless, the new being remains an individual because it comes with its own collection of impressions and memories, with the knowledge of pain and suffering, happiness and contentment. These impressions are in the form of karma and, depending on which impression is strongest, the particular chakra which is related to it will be most affected and stimulated. For example, if somebody was really insecure at the time of death and there was a lot of emotional turmoil, then they will be more blocked at the level of anahata and swadhisthana. That block will manifest again in later life.

Past karmas, together with the nature we receive from the mother, affect who we become as a human being. Different traditions have various things to say about this, but I am speaking from the point of view of the vedic and tantric traditions.

What is the view yogis have of UFOs making their presence felt?

In the Indian tradition, it is said that there are an infinite number of universes. In those universes, which belong to different planes and dimensions, there exist different kinds of life forms. Sometimes these life forms can communicate with life forms in other universes or systems. We are still not able to discover how vast the entire creation is. No matter how far we go, even when the galaxies have thinned out and

disappeared and the nova have come and gone, we see that only space exists, and space itself is creation. We do not know the beginning or the end of creation, with due respect to the Big Bang theory.

Most of the ancient scriptures have spoken of visitations from other beings. The *Mahabharata* is full of them. The *Ramayana* is full of them. In the Indian tradition, practically all books have references to these, and they are not only mythological thoughts or science fiction. There is truth behind it.

Do you think it would work if yoga and healing could be combined with theatre in order to help people understand their minds and bodies better, develop more awareness and jolt them out of their ruts in life?

I am not an expert on theatre, but I can see that there is a great possibility of combining the concepts and principles of yoga and healing into a play. Theatre is a very good medium to generate awareness in certain groups of people. Nowadays we consider theatre and other arts as a means of self-expression and enjoyment; however, we also have to understand that there are different groups of human beings in the world. Some are intellectuals who derive their learning from literature and implement what they have read in a positive way. Others who are not of this category derive their learning from other sources like theatre, because they see something being enacted which is relevant to their life and so they can accept it.

Theatre can be a powerful medium for bringing the message of health, wellbeing and also spirituality to people. Of course, you have to decide what kind of themes would be suitable for the mentality of the audience. In the ashram some time ago we put on small plays. One Sivaratri there was a play about Shiva and Parvati. One Christmas we enacted the story of Jesus. At the culmination of the English Sannyasa Course, the play was about Yudhishtira and the Yaksha, or spirit. In all these plays, which were performed in a light

mood, the message which came across was very appropriate to the audience and situation in the ashram at that time. Such plays and other art forms can definitely work as agents to promote positive and inspiring thoughts, and if they touch the depth of your being they can also bring about an inner transformation.

From my understanding, brahmacharya is related more with establishing oneself in constant contemplation of Brahma than with sexual abstinence. How then does it fit into the yamas, the social codes, as it appears to be more of an internal discipline?

Your understanding is correct, but you have missed a very vital point. It is true that brahmacharya is not related with sexual and sensual abstinence, rather it is a frame of mind, and if you allow that frame of mind to become permanent then your external actions will also change.

Inner experience has no meaning if it does not affect your external life. If inner experience does not affect your external life then it could just be a pure dream or fantasy. It is like saying we eat food to satisfy our hunger, why waste time chewing the food? Food and hunger are the important things and chewing is a process. In the same way, both inner experience and its effect on outer life are important. Please remember this. Inner experience cannot only be confined to the realm of mind. If that experience does not have the power to touch your external life then it is not an experience. It is pure fantasy, pure imagination, pure dream, which you may have with your eyes open, or in meditation in an ashram, or in the presence of an enlightened being.

This is one of the traps of the human mind which can give the impression of reality to something which is not real. You think something and believe it to be true, but that belief may not necessarily be real; it may not be based on facts. It may not be based on reality, yet we hold that to be true and are unwilling to change our opinion. This is a very great

weakness of the human mind, which is emphasized more when an analytical process attaches itself to the belief or feeling. We analyze things without having full knowledge or understanding of the subject, and come to conclusions that become final for us.

In yoga, or in any of the traditional sciences which lead to self-development and enlightenment, no one is authorized to give a decision on any subject until they are the master of that subject. If you are not the master of a subject you have no right or authority to pass judgement. This is one of the rules of any spiritual or physical science. You cannot give a judgement about physics. This applies to all disciplines and especially to yoga. In yoga you have to consider your external as well as your internal life, your external environment and its association with your inner being or inner personality. You cannot separate the inner from the outer. Any form of inner experience is bound to have some kind of repercussion on the external dimension.

The yamas and niyamas as they have been described in the *Yoga Sutras* are disciplines which reflect a state of harmony within your mind and actions. They are not disciplines which give you a double identity in life, so that when you meditate you have a good experience, and when you open your eyes you become the most crooked person on earth. No, the yamas and niyamas are not meant to give compartmentalized experiences, whereby inner is only inner and outer is only outer. Rather, they reflect the harmony of inner experience, understanding and wisdom with the external action. Therefore it is appropriate that concepts like brahmacharya; *satya*, truthfulness; and *ahimsa*, non-violence; be part of a discipline which ultimately transforms one's life internally and externally.

If you could choose, where would you be born in your next life?

The nicest place to live, at least for me, is India. Here we do not have rights, but we do have freedom, so much freedom

that even dogs and cows can wander on the road without the catcher coming and taking them to their pen. I am not talking of India in a social or political context because every nation has its own destiny, but as far as the cultural and spiritual environment goes, it is a stable place. I am not talking of the religious fundamentalism which is all over the world.

The cultural seed of thousands and thousands of years of contemplation and thinking is still alive in India, and as long as that seed is alive, vibrant and green, I would always pray to be born in India. Poverty is a social thing, a political thing, an economic thing. I have never looked at India in that light. I have always looked at India and identified with India in relation to its cultural and spiritual background. India is God's country.

A German writer came to India once, and when he went back to Germany he wrote in a newspaper, "Previously I never believed in God, but after having gone to India, I very strongly believe in God. How can things function in such a disorganized way? It is only a superior power that can make it happen!"

In the West the concept of the masters is being used. They speak of being on the seventh dimension and say that the earth is progressing from the third to the fourth and fifth dimension. What is the yogic view?

In yoga we speak of twenty-one dimensions or lokas which have different names. The first seven belong to the realm of instinctive consciousness. The next seven belong to the realm of human consciousness, and the last seven belong to divine consciousness, spirit, and the essence of light.

Definitely, many masters have attained a very high sensitivity of consciousness and can be called the realized beings or the enlightened ones. They live in other dimensions including the physical. Sometimes they come to the physical dimension in order to guide humanity through times of crisis.

Are the ashrams operating independently or is there an organizational hierarchy or structure?

The International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM) which is the original institution founded by our guru Sri Swami Satyananda, was founded in 1956. It is a registered organization which aims to promote yoga and the yogic lifestyle, and to encourage yogic education. This fellowship is the parent body of all Bihar School of Yoga branches in India, including Ganga Darshan and all other affiliated organizations, whether in Australia, Greece, Italy, Germany, England or any other part of the world. They come under the umbrella of IYFM.

One becomes a member of the IYFM by means of a charter. One aspect of the charter is that it recognizes the yogic tradition that has continued from Swami Sivananda, through Sri Swami Satyananda to the present day. It emphasizes a coordinated yoga teaching and training program through study, conventions and research with the help of other professional institutions.

Another aspect of the IYFM charter is to establish a standard yoga teaching world-wide. Of course, it allows for changes according to the mentality of different cultures and countries, while at the same time enabling them to follow the moral and spiritual disciplines which are the guidelines of every centre and ashram. The centre or ashram should not only become a place of commercial activity, but also retain a yogic and spiritual identity. There should be a standard, defined way of teaching with moral and spiritual guidelines.

The charter is also designed to encourage the swamis, karma sannyasins and yoga teachers to get to know one another by regularly organizing conferences and meetings. They can discuss the mode of teaching and have their own projects to fulfil.

The purpose of the charter is to allow people to become affiliated with the Bihar School of Yoga so we can work in unity towards one goal. The relationship between the Bihar School of Yoga, which is the head office of the IYFM around

the world, and the other ashrams or branches within and outside the country, is that of spiritual affiliation. There is no legal or financial control. Our affiliation is spiritual; our desire is to serve others.

It is a good system because everyone is allowed their own style of ashram. They can live as they want, yet at the same time maintain their identity of yoga aspirant, karma sannyasin, poorna sannyasin, jignasu sannyasin, or even visitor, admirer, supporter or bystander. They can all follow their own inclination. The ashrams in India are run differently than the ashrams in Australia, which are run differently than the ashrams in Greece, and are run differently in France, England or Italy and other locations. Each country follows its own nature and yet maintains a spiritual affiliation.

Is hatha yoga just the shatkarmas, cleansing practices, or does it include asana and pranayama? Furthermore, what is the connection between hatha and kundalini yoga?

Traditionally, hatha yoga is only the six cleansing practices or *shatkarmas*: neti, dhauti, basti, kapalbhathi, nauli and trataka. It is intended to purify the physical body by removing toxins, infection, disease, stress and tension in order to balance the two pranic flows, ida and pingala. Hatha yoga in the form of the shatkarmas was used as a preparatory stage for kundalini yoga, the awakening of the chakras.

Theory of hatha yoga is very closely connected with theory of kundalini yoga. Hatha yoga speaks of harmonizing between ida and pingala, and kundalini yoga speaks of ida and pingala as being the nadis which cross through each chakra in turn. With the awakening of kundalini these two flows become the catalyst for awakening the third flow, sushumna. When sushumna opens, kundalini awakens and passes through the different chakras. This is the basic connection between hatha and kundalini yoga.

Later, it was revealed that there are other forms of prana in the body which do not necessarily flow through

the ida and pingala pathways all the time. These subflows are governed by the forces of ida and pingala but flow in different parts of the body, not only in the spinal cord. Later still, in order to control these minor flows and attune them to ida and pingala, the mudras and bandhas were added to hatha yoga. In order to soften the impact of these mudras and bandhas and to contain the hyperactivity of the pranas, the complement of asana and pranayama was also introduced.

Today, hatha yoga combines the shatkarmas plus asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha. These are the ten practices of hatha yoga today.

What are the most important qualities for a yoga teacher to have?

The process of learning and teaching through yoga is ongoing; therefore it is difficult to say what the specific qualities of a good yoga teacher should be. First, I would emphasize the quality of understanding; understanding the needs and requirements, and the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual state of the aspirants who come to learn yoga.

A good yoga teacher should realize that each student has come to yoga for a particular purpose. Our teaching cannot, therefore, be a rubber stamp we put on everyone, labelling them as 'students of yoga' and teaching them according to our belief. Naturally, our understanding and belief play an important part in it; however, there has to be a greater understanding of the different personalities, mentalities and aspirations with which people come to yoga.

Second, many yoga teachers try to teach something which they themselves do not know and understand fully. For them, yoga teaching is an issue of prestige and image. A sincere yoga teacher should not try to go beyond their present level of understanding. They should teach only according to their understanding and knowledge and not beyond. This is another quality of a good yoga teacher. If you keep these two qualities in mind, I am sure you will be

able to improve in many different ways and find a better means to express yourself.

What is the meaning and origin of the giving of a spiritual name?

The original purpose in giving a name was to enable one to develop a particular innate quality. Over the ages the concept changed and it became a means of imparting a mere social identity. Now even this concept is changing and soon we will all be going around with numbers! After a few generations, I will be Saraswati, Sw 983. That will be my identity.

Yogis have always tried to identify the nature or quality of the spirit rather than the physical body, so that the person being called by the name is in constant remembrance of a higher goal. If people knew the real meaning of their name, they would not need a spiritual name.

For example, take the name Peter. Peter means 'rock'. A rock can symbolize stubbornness, strength of character or willpower. What quality are we trying to identify here? Strength of personality and character are represented by the name Peter, but 99.9 percent of Peters in the world do not even know the meaning of their name. So a Sanskrit name is given which represents a particular type of nature, a quality of spirit, a goal for which we can strive.

The world is identified in three ways: quality, form and name. Quality is the manifest nature of spirit. Form is the manifest identity, the body, in which the spirit is contained. Name is the identity by which we can recognize the quality of spirit. This is the yogic concept. We are all combinations of quality, form and name, although we have forgotten the quality represented by our name and identify with the physical form.

If my name is Niranjan, then of course my body is recognized by that name, but the name also means the nature of spirit which is untainted, immaculate. If, through my name, I can identify with that quality of my spirit I will become enlightened. That is the purpose of having a

spiritual name. The spiritual name acts as a mantra to help us come closer to the source of our being, in the same way as our personal mantra does.

What is the purpose of jignasu initiation? How will we know that we are ready to receive this initiation?

Jignasu initiation is not necessary for a person who is on the spiritual path. Neither is karma sannyasa or poorna sannyasa. These initiations are given to people who wish to commit themselves to develop certain qualities. Of course, not everybody can keep up their commitment, that is a different matter; however, the purpose is to make one aware that there are certain qualities which can be imbibed and developed in order to make one a better human being, a spiritually enlightened or awakened being.

Jignasu means aspirant. In sannyasa, two things are emphasized again and again. One is *viveka*, discernment, and the other is *vairagya*, non-attachment. Viveka and vairagya, according to Shankaracharya, who was the codifier of the sannyasa tradition, are the two wings of sannyasa. By means of these two wings, one can find inner creativity and experience the expansiveness of consciousness, thus these two ideas became linked with the sannyasa system.

There are different stages in the sannyasa lifestyle. It begins with jignasu sannyasa in the modern age, and ends with *poorna*, or full, sannyasa. Jignasu is the seeker initiation which helps you understand yourself, your aspirations and desires, strengths and weaknesses. This stage helps you work through the grey areas of your life, and awaken or cultivate qualities which can be beneficial to your inner and spiritual development.

After passing through the stage of jignasu, you come to karma sannyasa which is renunciation of the results or fruits of your actions. In karma sannyasa you try to find a balance between your ambitions and your actions. You do not try to escape from any action. After karma sannyasa is poorna sannyasa.

What is the role of enlightened persons in this world? For example, is their role only to develop their own spirituality, or is it their duty and responsibility to make a concerted effort to help others?

You have to ask that question to an enlightened person, because whatever I say will only be a speculation. We do not know what goes on in their minds. We do not know how they look at the world, how they wish to see us develop.

As long as enlightened persons have a body and mind they have to follow the laws of karma. Let us look at the examples of various enlightened beings, starting with one in our recent history, Jesus. He was an enlightened being. There is no doubt that he had attained a very high level of union with God, yet he had to suffer. He had to work and act in a certain way in order to fulfil his karma. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, another enlightened being, also had to satisfy the law of karma. If you look at the history of all enlightened people, you will find that each one played their role according to their particular karma.

It was not necessary for Christ to run around the Middle East trying to preach the path of God. He could easily have sat in a corner on some mountain and led a very peaceful and quiet life. It was not necessary for Ramakrishna Paramahansa to take on the karmas of other people and eventually die of cancer. It was not necessary for Swami Sivananda to start a mission and go through the pains and problems of starting this endeavour. It was not necessary for all such people to go through the process of life in which there is pain and suffering; however, they did it, because they were moved by compassion on seeing the karma of other human beings.

There are different kinds of people, those who are simply educators, those who are working whole-heartedly to uplift and reform society, and those who are sitting in remote corners of the world, unseen and unheard, involved in their own thing. Each is playing out his or her karma or role in life according to the inspiration which they receive from the

Divine. To speculate exactly what the role of those people should be is not proper. Rather, we should try to imbibe the teaching which they have given to us.

It has been stated many times that yoga is not a religion but the union of the self with the cosmos. However, various Hindu deities are worshipped by different groups of sannyasins, and in Mahamrityunjaya mantra there is reference to the three-eyed one, Shiva. How does this apparent religious observance relate to the stated position that yoga is non-religious?

Yoga is certainly not a religion in the way we understand religion today. There are two ways of understanding religion. The first is the concept of religion as a structured belief, like Islam, Christianity, Shintoism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Shaktism and others. The second concept is of the external obligation and commitment one has towards the evolution of consciousness. It concerns the positive and creative contribution one makes to society, friends, family, strangers, nation, and the world in general, for their upliftment and evolution. That is the second concept of religion.

The first concept, that of structural belief, does not come into the realm of yoga at all because yoga only speaks of *Ishwara*, the unmanifest, undecaying reality. This has been stated in the *Yoga Sutras* and other yoga texts like the *Gheranda Samhita* of Sage Gheranda, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* of Swatmarama, the *Dattatreya Samhita* of Dattatreya, and the *Parashuram Samhita* of Parashuram. These are different treatises on yoga written at different times in antiquity, and nowhere have they mentioned that a yogi must adhere to a belief or a manifest form of divinity.

The whole aim of yoga is *nirakara*, realization of the unmanifest. Therefore, at the time of initiation into poorna sannyasa the mantra changes and the disciple receives the sannyasa mantra relating to nirakara, the unmanifest Self.

Yoga believes in the evolution of individual consciousness. It says that human consciousness has the potential to evolve and shed all self-created images, forms, ideas, identities and beliefs, and ultimately realize the cosmic or universal nature of the Self. This involves a transition from individual to cosmic identity. Yoga also says that, once you attain a cosmic identity you become omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.

Omnipotence is the awakening of Shakti or kundalini through the different chakras, finally merging with the aspect of Shiva, pure consciousness. Once this energy merges with our pure nature, which is the concept of kundalini yoga, we have the potential of omnipotence.

After omnipotence comes omnipresence. Omnipresence is more than being everywhere at one time. It is being aware of everything at one time, being present in every moment.

In this context, the union of the individual with the universal consciousness is a reality in yoga. It is not just a belief. In this way yoga is clearly distinct from the so-called 'structural religious' concepts.

In relation to different religious observances, it is very much a matter for the individual. Sannyasins are given one symbol: the flame or the light. Within light lies the manifestation of every form of divinity. You may see Christ; somebody else may see Krishna, Shiva, Mohammed or Buddha, because that is their symbol.

People have their own personal preferences. Some may adore Shiva, others may worship Christ, Mother Mary, or Kali. These personal characteristics do not reflect the idea of yoga. It reflects their personal attachment. I may believe in Shiva and respect him more than other people do. Or I may have special feelings for Rama, Christ, Zeus, Thor, Krishna, Radha, Saraswati, Lakshmi or Sita. It makes no difference.

Some people, because of their over-enthusiasm, want to share what they feel with others. They may find that when they perform their particular form of worship the whole environment changes, so why doesn't everyone do it? That is how the trend begins. The people who do not understand

this side of things feel that some form of ritualistic observances are being linked with the yogic practices; however, this is a wrong concept. Anybody can offer whatever they feel like to the deity with which they identify. I offer food to Shiva three times a day. I take Shiva for walks on the leash. I take Shiva to the bathroom whenever he gets up from sleep. Sri Swamiji does the same with Ganesha in Deoghar. That is his private life. Since he renounced his mission, and started to lead his own life as a private citizen and not a public figure, he became free to do as he pleased.

In relation to the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, every mantra represents a particular sound frequency and vibration. These vibrations, these sound frequencies act at a deeper level of our personality. No verbal meaning can actually be given to a mantra. According to the yogic concepts, mantra is a force which has the potential to liberate the mind from its limitation, bondage, and self-imposed restriction. There are fifty sound frequencies represented in different chakras. In kundalini yoga it is shown that in each chakra there is a sound frequency for each petal of the lotuses. On each petal a consonant or vowel is inscribed representing these sound frequencies, each of which stimulates a particular aspect of the chakra. Let us look at the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*, for example. *Om* is the mantra of ajna chakra. *Na* is a mantra belonging to vishuddhi chakra, a sub-mantra, not the bija mantra. *Mah* and *shi* are the mantras of petals in other chakras. *Va* is the bija mantra *Vam* of swadhisthana. *Ya* is the bija mantra of anahata.

In the course of time, when spiritual practices were at a low ebb in society, a method had to be found to keep the tradition alive. With the rise and fall of different civilizations and cultures, many things were simply lost. So, in order to preserve them the mantras were identified with symbols known by the people. The mantras were duly classified as Shiva mantras, Shakti mantras, etc. The purpose and effect of this was that people practising a particular technique identified with something they held dear in life: a figure, an

image, a symbol, a belief, a philosophy, a thought, a lifestyle, a quality and so forth. That is how mantras were dubbed as 'deity mantras', but in fact they are not.

You are asking this question because you have come to India and see different images you consider to be religious, but what about those people who will never come to India? They practise Mahamrityunjaya mantra without even knowing that it is related to the concept of Shiva. And they get better results in the practice of mantra because they are concentrating on the sound vibration while the thought is going around and around in your head, "What am I doing this for? I don't know who Shiva is." In this case ignorance is actually better than knowledge.

Looking at the other side of it, if you can identify with a symbol or with a quality that you wish to have, then the concentration of mind brought about by this process also aids in the development of the power of the mantra. If I can identify with Shiva, having the image of him sitting in meditation wearing a tiger skin, with snakes around his body, holding a trident and water flowing out of his locks, my concentration will definitely be better. Maybe Shiva lived or maybe he did not, we do not know. That is only a belief, a concept or theory, but I am identifying with an image which represents something to me. I may meditate on Christ or the cross because those images touch my innermost feelings and bring them to the surface. This happens through concentration of the mind and intensity of willpower in combination with the mantra.

Then a subtle change begins to take place in the personality which helps to develop a particular quality and an altered state of consciousness.

How do you choose a sankalpa and what do you do until you have found it?

One has to understand the concept of sankalpa clearly. *Sankalpa* means resolution, a positive, creative, constructive resolution which we can adopt in our life. The ultimate aim

of sankalpa is the expression of creativity and inner harmony. Yoga sees sankalpa in two forms: one is the great sankalpa, which is known in Sanskrit as *mahasankalpa*, *maha* means great, and the other is the small sankalpa, which is known in Sanskrit as *anusankalpa*, *anu* meaning minute. In order to train and educate the mind we need to start with the basics; we cannot impose a very high concept, idea or discipline on ourselves in the beginning. The moment we do that there will be failure because there will be no consistency in what we are trying to do, and an important prerequisite of sankalpa is consistency.

I will give you one example. If my sankalpa is to wake up at 4 am then I should be consistent. I should wake up at 4 am every day. My sankalpa is just to wake up at 4 am; it is not to get up at 4 am to practise asana, pranayama and meditation. No, my sankalpa is a very simple one. What I do after waking up at 4 am has nothing to do with my sankalpa that is a matter of routine. After waking up I am free to follow any routine I want. Even if I feel lazy at times and think, “I won’t get up today, it is cold and my bed is nice and warm and comfortable.” It does not matter, you should be able to follow your sankalpa to wake up at 4 am, even if you get out of bed, go to the bathroom, and then go back to bed and sleep. At least fulfil the sankalpa which you have made. After that you can sleep until seven or eight. This is the process of educating the mind.

The initial purpose of sankalpa is not to attain high things, but to provide a basic training for the mind so that it begins to respond according to our instructions. That is the first point. Start with something simple and basic.

The second point is, do not use any negative words in the sankalpa, such as “I will not smoke.” ‘Not’ is a negation to be avoided. If I smoke and I want to stop gradually, my sankalpa could be, “I will smoke one less cigarette daily” or “I will gradually reduce the number of daily cigarettes.” The habit of the mind is to react to negations and there are very few people who can adjust to them. Those who have strong willpower, strong determination can say, “From tomorrow I

am not going to do it”, and there will be no one on earth who can make them do it. Such people are very rare. We have to consider ourselves, not as special, but as people who are trying to educate and orientate our nature, behaviour and personality in a positive way. We have to follow a very simple and systematic process.

You have to consider your personality to be like a jumbo jet, where the turning process is very slow. You cannot instantly turn left or right but have to take a big curve. You cannot take a sharp turn. The words of the sankalpa have to be chosen very carefully so that you can identify with them. It should not be a strain on your thinking and psyche.

Try to think in terms of the future. “What do I really desire from my life?” A sankalpa does not have to be chosen this instant; you can take years thinking about it. Before choosing the final sankalpa you can start with simple, basic ones. To have a sankalpa like, “I wish to be self-realized in this life”, is a nearly impossible sankalpa. That is like saying, “I want to reach the sun”, which is physically impossible. Long before we reach the sun our body will burn up. You have to be practical when choosing a sankalpa. Begin with basic resolves to educate your nature, thinking, behaviour and personality, and proceed one step at a time! The moment you educate yourself and attain inner harmony and joy, the right sankalpa will manifest.

How can we remove our inner selfishness, greed and jealousy?

A pickpocket died and went to heaven. Saint Peter was standing waiting for him outside the pearly gates. He asked, “Who are you?” The pickpocket replied, “I’m a pickpocket.” Saint Peter said, “What is your story?” The pickpocket told him his story, whereupon Saint Peter told him, “Heaven is no place for you, go to hell, but first return my watch!” Even at the gates of heaven selfishness and greed do not go away. Actually, they do not disappear until one attains total samadhi.

Through sadhana and meditation, as we learn to observe ourselves, harmonize our mind and expressions, and develop greater awareness, it becomes possible to channel our selfishness, greed and jealousy. They are in the form of vrittis. You may eradicate them from the surface of the mind, from the manifest aspect of your nature; however, they will remain in the form of a seed, *pratyaya* or archetype.

Patanjali has described this stage very aptly (*Yoga Sutras* 4:27) “The pratyaya are seeds which have not yet manifested”, even after dhyana, even when you move into the initial stages of samadhi, from sabija to nirbija, nirvitarka, savichara, nirvichara, and all the different forms of samadhi which have been described in the *Yoga Sutras*. There comes a point when you reach the pratyaya level, the level of archetypes or impressions which are latent in seed form. An effort is made in samadhi to remove those pratyaya and the moment they are removed one attains cosmic realization.

There is another good way to overcome selfishness, greed and jealousy: live, love and laugh. If you cry and are sad you will not be able to do it. You have to live life. Do not try to escape from life, rather, run into it with both arms open. That is living. Escaping from life is not living. Love not only your wife or husband and dear ones, but everyone. Have universal awareness, even though it may be momentary, a few minutes every day when you can break down the barrier of ‘me’ and ‘you’, and just be able to see everything with the eyes of love. Laughter is acceptance, enjoyment of what is happening, not sadness, anxiety and crying. These three things can definitely help us overcome selfishness, greed, jealousy, hatred, anger and frustration.

How do we bridge the huge gap between our beliefs and actions?

We bridge the gap by taking full sannyasa. I do not think it is easy to bridge the gap between what one thinks and feels to be right, and what one actually does, because we are

moved by, and our actions depend on many different things: ambition, need, desire, thought, personal feelings and the feelings of others also. I will tell you a story in relation to this question. Once there was a professional robber who would waylay people in the forest every day and take away their money and possessions. One day the robber waylaid a sannyasin who had nothing. The robber asked him, "Aren't you afraid of me? Other people fear to come this way, why have you come?" The sannyasin said, "No, I'm not afraid. Why should I be afraid of you when I'm not afraid of God? Who are you in front of God?"

The robber said, "I'll kill you." "Go ahead, who cares!" replied the sannyasin, "If you kill me, well and fine, that won't make me fearful of you. I'll accept my death, but do you know what you are doing?" The robber said, "Of course I know what I'm doing. I rob people in order to sustain my family. I look after my children. I send them to school. They are getting a good education; my wife gets good jewellery, clothes, fine food. Of course I know what I'm doing."

The sannyasin asked, "Do you also know that you are acquiring bad karma?" "No, I didn't know that. What is bad karma?" "It's something that is going to change your life in the future. It will make you suffer. The suffering which you have given to others will come back to you. That is bad karma." The robber said, "Well I don't mind killing people and robbing them because I share whatever I gain with my family. They will share my bad karma. We are four people in the family, we will suffer twenty-five percent each, no problem."

The sannyasin told the robber, "I'm not so sure your family will share your bad karma with you. You'd better go and ask them." The dacoit replied, "I'll go, but I know that as soon as I go you're going to run away from here." The sannyasin told him, "Okay, you tie me up and then you go and ask your family and if I'm right, promise me that you will stop robbing people. If I'm wrong then you can kill me and take my two dhotis and make shorts for your children."

The dacoit tied up the sannyasin, went home, asked his family, “Look, are you going to share the bad karma that I have accumulated by robbing so many people in order to care for you?” Everyone said, “No, why should we share it, that’s your own business! It is your duty to provide for us.” With that the robber’s eyes opened up. He came back immediately to the sannyasin, released him and said, “Make me your disciple.” Later, that robber became a great rishi by the name of Valmiki who wrote the original *Ramayana*. The sannyasin was Sage Narada.

The only way to bridge the gap is to have a shock like this. We get shocks from time to time that change our life, and I think it is the work of divine providence. In the meantime, try to be aware of how you think and feel, and how you act. See where the imbalance is taking place, where you are not able to manage yourself. Through a process of reflective introspection you can reduce the distance between your beliefs and actions, and finally make them one. It is possible, but it depends on the intensity of your reflection and your determination to change yourself.

How can yoga help the sportsman gain better physical health and improve his performance on the field?

Each sport requires a different type of physical fitness and stamina for which there is the relevant training. However, some principles are considered basic by both yoga and other methods of fitness training. These include maintaining the system in a balanced way, so that stress does not accumulate in specific parts of the body, and better coordination for the physiological systems so they can cope with situations of intense stress. In sport, it is not only physical fitness which is important, but also the mental attitude.

Australian sportsmen are being trained for the Olympics using practices and principles of yoga along with their own fitness training. Emphasis is given to pranayama and concentration techniques; as concentration of the mind is obtained, performance of the body improves. The practice

of yoga nidra, which they call deep physical relaxation, is also given during training. Similarly, other sports associations around the world, specifically in the US, the UK and Canada, are incorporating yogic techniques into their training programs.

The initial question was how to make the body perform better during sports. However, now the emphasis has changed. It has become a matter of how to make the mind perform better for the body. One can even say it is the concept of mind over matter which is slowly gaining prominence in sports. What is generally known as ‘the killer instinct’ represents sharpness of mind. This can be gained through a combination of practices, including yoga and other training provided by sports organizations, which aim at harmonizing body and mind.

When two groups are competing, they psych themselves up to believe that the other group is the enemy who has to be vanquished. Absolute and total aggression comes forth at that time. Psyching yourself up to believe that the other person is the enemy who you have to beat and win, is of course, the tamasic vritti of the mind. It is necessary to change this to a sattwic way of thinking, where self-confidence is maintained without negativity being projected. Psychologists have found that self-confidence in one’s own ability is more powerful than negative projection. Therefore, this attitude change is an important aspect not only in sports, but in life generally.

What should we teach our students about the importance of guru?

Guru is very much an individual concept and people have to evolve into it. They have to understand the concept of guru slowly. Suddenly, an interest may come to find out a bit more about spiritual life. Then there is a series of meetings with different people until we find somebody with whom we click. This is all a process of gradual evolution. There are also those who are instantly connected with the guru. I call this the instant guru-disciple relationship. It happens very

much on an individual level. The guru-disciple relationship is not something that can be taught in a class.

There is another side to this which may confuse you a bit. There are some people who need to be told that someone is their guru. They have attained a higher level of evolution and are not aware of it. They have to be told, "Listen, you are my disciple" or "I am your guru" or "You should find a guru." Ramakrishna Paramahansa did that to Swami Vivekananda. He forced him to become a disciple by one simple statement. In their first meeting Ramakrishna said to him, "Narendra, I have been waiting for you for ages." That triggered off a series of changes in the mind of Vivekananda, "What does he mean he has been waiting for me?" Ramakrishna told him, "Look, I have been waiting for you, you are my disciple and I am your guru."

Many different kinds of people practise yoga and we need to recognize their needs in order to become better teachers. Then we can become a friend to our students like Ramakrishna became Vivekananda's friend, apart from being his master and guru. More than master and guru he was possibly the only true friend Vivekananda ever had. Many times there is an emotional bond with the guru who becomes an authoritarian figure. This authoritarian image can create fear and submission, which is not good. There should not be fear; however, at the same time there should not be arrogance. The relationship has to have a spirit of freedom, of faith in each other. As a general rule, let people evolve naturally into a relationship with a guru, but if the time for them to have a guru has come then you should be able to direct them to go and find one.

If following the ashram discipline causes suffering to the body, should one continue to follow it or not, and to what extent?

It is a question of attitude. Try to see the reason behind the discipline. An ashram is not a place of comfort; it is a place of struggle. It is not a place of isolation, but involvement. It

teaches us not to run away from life, but to run into life. This is the purpose of the ashram. You may accept, or you may quit, that is up to you, but you have to know the purpose for which an ashram is made.

It is the environment which is important. It is the direction the ashram is moving which is important. The ability and strength of each person has to be recognized in an ashram and not the weakness and the debility. When you can recognize the strength of different people and encourage them to develop it in a positive way, then the purpose of the ashram is fulfilled.

Suffering is necessary. That is the personal philosophy of Sri Swamiji. To undergo physical and mental duress is necessary in order to bring up the dormant, hidden potential. We become so complacent by avoiding the critical situations of pain and suffering that we lose our ability to cope with the conflicts in life, and so we suffer. However, if we can consciously accept the need for a certain level of suffering, and remain unaffected by it, we can bring out the best within us and create a different philosophy of suffering altogether. There has to be some form of suffering in everyone's life. Even if it is self-imposed it is good, because it is part of our education.

You may have enough money to eat ten varieties of vegetable, three varieties of dal, many varieties of rice, roti, spaghetti and pizza, but you should make a sankalpa, "I will have khichari!" That is self-imposed suffering. Why do we want to give ourselves the feeling of living in luxury all the time? That is a form of weakness; it is hiding from ourselves and our own true nature. We do not want to recognize the bad, negative and detrimental, but they are also a part of us. We are always seeking pleasure, pleasure, and pleasure and losing the ability to cope with the other aspect, the suffering and the pain.

Is there any difference between Vedanta and jnana yoga or are they the same? Why is jnana yoga called the razor's edge?

Vedanta, tantra, Samkhya, and so on, are philosophies, but they have a practical aspect as well. I am not talking about

religion. Religion and philosophy are different. Philosophy is an ideal. *Jnana*, or wisdom, is the basis of everything and is known as *sophia* in Greek. *Philos* means to love. The word philosophy means ‘the love of knowing’ or ‘to love the known.’ You could also say that it means to appreciate the seen. The entire process of appreciation and loving is an extension of the process of knowing. There is a totality of wisdom in the process of knowing through experiment, experience, logic, deduction, rationality, normal interaction and feeling.

Jnana yoga is a process of remembering what is already known. At present, you know, but you do not live what you know. You know many things but you cannot live up to them. When we add the word ‘yoga’ to the word jnana it means to have the living experience of knowing, or to live the knowledge. That is the true meaning of jnana yoga, and the basis of jnana yoga is wisdom, common sense to begin with, openness of nature to end with and through the process of applying the wisdom, putting into action what is known. Although yoga talks about jnana and gives methods for experiencing jnana yoga, real jnana yoga does not begin until you achieve the state of dhyana. Jnana yoga is not intellectual, it is experiential, and in order to develop the experiential faculty, *dhyana*, or meditation, has to be perfected.

Vedanta is a system of thought, a philosophy in its own right. The followers of Vedanta can reach great heights by following its principles; however, it is simultaneously an open school of thought which says that the whole of creation can be seen as God: *Sarvam khalvidam Brahman* – “The whole of visible and invisible creation is God.” Vedanta speaks of experiencing the existence of God in each and every thing. Jnana yoga is an inner process which begins at whatever level you may be, not necessarily with God and creation. It can begin with your mundane personal problems also. You do not need to have high-flying thoughts to practise jnana yoga. The thoughts can also be very material, physical and sensual.

Personal difficulties and handicaps can act as a catalyst for discovering our limitations, creativity, force of will and clarity of mind. If you are aware that all these little changes are happening, it is part of the process of jnana yoga. Whether it is jnana yoga, complete yoga or a different system of thought like Vedanta, Samkhya or Nyaya, the underlying factor in all these is the application of wisdom. Knowledge gets converted into wisdom when applied practically in life.

There are different levels of jnana yoga. Each level of yoga in its basic form can be practised at any level. Just as basic asanas, shatkriyas, bhakti yoga, kirtan or meditation can be practised by anyone, jnana yoga in its most basic form can be practised by everyone. As far as the statement of jnana yoga being called the razor's edge, at one level it holds true, because when we begin to apply our understanding and wisdom in life, the aspect of ego is also stimulated, which can become the cause of either our fall or our upliftment. However, if you make a general statement that jnana yoga is like a razor's edge, I would not agree with you. Rather, I would say that our present lifestyle over which we have no control is the razor's edge.

We do not have control over our mind. We fall down left and right. Trying to deal with our own nature and the mind is a much sharper razor's edge than jnana yoga, which is totally blunt compared to our present life experience. It does not cut at all, but material life is a very sharp razor, it can bleed a person to death. Many people lose their mental and emotional balance at one time or another. Some people fall into a depression from which they cannot recover. Some people become addicts and cannot break the habit. I think that is a much sharper razor's edge than jnana yoga, because we can transcend the negative conditions with the help of jnana yoga and we have the support of a guru if we are sincere.

I have learnt that ida and pingala nadis flow in cycles of ninety minutes each, but in my case the change of flow

takes place only after four to five hours. Kindly give some guidance on this.

I hope you have taken into account the factor of your blocked nostrils, because even the slightest thickening of the nasal nerves and mucous membranes can affect the flow. A deviated septum can also alter the flow of the swara. The thickening of the nasal bone, membrane or nerves can put pressure on the nadis which control the flow of the swara.

Another reason could be that your body cycle has a different rhythm. In your case, the changeover every forty-five to ninety minutes may not apply. The information given in *Shiva Swarodaya* and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* gives common indications concerning the normal flows in the body. Who knows, you may be a special case! I would not worry about it.

You should experiment by trying to change the flow of the swara using pressure techniques like the yoga danda or a pillow, and see if the swara changes, and for how long it remains like that. You will have to discover, through such experimentation, whether it is a defect in the flow of swara or the natural swara of your own physical system.

The literature of yoga warns against over-intellectualization, but in class we make a close study of definitions. How can we find a balance between intellectual study and intuitive feeling?

Once you finish the class, forget about the whole thing. Knowing about a technique is one thing and going into a head-trip about it is another. Yoga, being a very subjective science which you have to experience for yourself, emphasizes that you also know the system of yoga properly. Then, in the process of your personal experimentation, you can deal with any experiences you have.

As you begin dealing more and more with your personality, you will come across certain aspects of yourself which are not acceptable to you and which can cause an imbalance, not enabling you to perform your duties properly, whether material, social, familial or spiritual.

You start doing some practice and you forget about what is written in the books, so you are unable to understand what is happening to you, and so you go off the track. You begin to experience mental imbalance and withdrawal symptoms. What will you do then? Your family will take you to psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, because they are not aware of how yoga practice affects the practitioner. In order for you to have an understanding of yoga, theory is given, so you can manage any experience.

Intellectualization is something else. We cannot intellectualize samadhi or dhyana. We cannot intellectualize many things, whether abstract or concrete, but at least we know the shortcomings and the beauties of the practices that we are going to encounter on the path, and we have to be ready for them. It is to provide a sense of self-confidence in your own process of evolution and development that theory is given, not to make you more confused.

I continue to have difficulty in maintaining meditation asanas. Patanjali says, “By the loosening of effort and by meditation on the serpent ananda, asana is mastered.” Will you please enlighten me on this to help me in my practice? My knees will be very grateful.

There is a very simple solution. The aim of every asana is to provide physical stability, so our approach to asana has to be slightly different from the normal, conventional one. We all get excited when we are asked to do difficult advanced asana, and feel happy that we are able to do them; however, it is of utmost importance to first prepare the body in a nice and gentle way so that it can find its stability and centre of balance. For that, the practices of pawanmuktasana are vital. Sri Swamiji derived the pawanmuktasana series from the tantras. They are a very effective way of toning and loosening up the body, and preparing it to sit for an extended period of time in one posture.

There are limited ways in which we can move the body, and in each phase of movement there can be problems

and pain. The different forms of physical movement are something which we do not take into consideration. Our concept of perfecting an asana is to have a flexible body, but the yogic tradition does not feel that flexibility of body is important and I am sure Patanjali would have agreed with me if he were alive. Flexibility depends on many factors such as age, culture and environment, and yogis have tried not to exclude older people from the practice of meditation.

Meditation on ananda is actually meditation on mooladhara, the serpent, in order to find stability. My suggestion would be to practice the techniques of pawanmuktasana for an extended period of time to tone up your body.

What are the different types of pain? How are they related to the koshas? Can all the koshas get hurt? If the higher koshas get hurt, how can they be healed?

The koshas do not go through states of pain or pleasure. What you experience as pain or pleasure are states of the manifest mind whereas the koshas represent the totality of the human personality in the manifest and unmanifest dimensions. The koshas are links between the material and cosmic levels of experience and it is not their quality to experience pain. Pain is experienced due to the conditioning of the mind, and you should apply your own wisdom to see how your mind is conditioned. The moment you realize the limitations and conditionings of this mind you will not feel pain any more.

Could you discuss the relationship between yoga and the *Bhagavad Gita*? If the concept of the *Bhagavad Gita* is based on the guru-disciple relationship, why do we talk of God?

The *Bhagavad Gita* and yoga are two different subjects. The teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* was given under very special circumstances and mental conditions. Yoga is a different subject altogether, although the *Bhagavad Gita* incorporates the concepts and components of yoga. In the *Bhagavad Gita*

you will find the gist of the various yogic concepts, but yoga is a wide structure in itself. When one has perfected yoga and begins to live it, it becomes an embodiment of the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Bhagavad Gita* also incorporates the philosophy of Samkhya, karma, human effort and knowing that all roads ultimately lead to God.

Why can't the guru talk to his disciple about God? The word *Gita* means song of God. It is natural for the guru to talk to his intimate disciples in different ways to make them see the reality of life, just as Christ talked to his disciples in the way they would understand. What the guru says to his disciples and what he says in public to the masses are two different things. To his disciples Christ said, "I and my Father are one", but to the masses he said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." Is that a discrepancy in his teaching? No. When he is talking to his close disciples he is talking on a different level. In the same way in the *Bhagavad Gita*, when Krishna is talking to Arjuna, he speaks from a different perspective, to a person who is experiencing conflict, tension, frustration and anxiety. The manner adopted is different.

How does one manage mental and emotional stress by yogic techniques?

More valid than yogic techniques is common sense. I do not agree with those people who see yoga as a technique to be done. Yoga is not like a medicine which you take. When we suffer from a malady, we learn techniques of yoga with the aim of making it a part of our existence and then yoga becomes a matter of common sense. It is using the observer faculty of the mind which knows right from wrong, the actual aim of yoga.

Why do we experience mental and emotional problems? We have certain expectations, beliefs and ways of looking at things and when situations are not compatible with our desires and aspirations, mental and emotional problems arise. If, however, through the practices of pratyahara and

dharana we are able to see our own nature, our own process of interacting with life, the mental and emotional problems will not affect us at all. They will not even exist in our life. The whole thing depends on our attitude towards ourselves, and our interactions.

In the process of enhancing our vision of ourselves, the techniques of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana play an important role. The ability to relax tension and stress, to focus our energies and consciousness, and to outgrow limiting situations, are attained by these practices. Initially you will practise yoga nidra as a technique of pratyahara. You may practise antar mouna as a technique of dharana and some other technique as a practice of dhyana, and eventually you will get to the same spot. There is no one technique for the removal of mental and emotional stress. All techniques complement each other and we just have to persist with the sadhana given by the guru.

If a person has suffered from anxiety, fear and insecurity over many years, what effect does it have on the pranas of the body and on manomaya kosha?

Pain and suffering have nothing to do with the koshas. They are creations of the mind and have to be dealt with by the mind, through a change in attitude and perception. We put a lot of emphasis on our fears, pains, frustrations and conflicts. The solution for such problems is very simple; we have to learn how to manage our mind, mind management. Yoga is the process of managing the mind. If we start to perfect yoga, then no matter what the problem is: fear, insecurity, anxiety, suffering or conflict, all can be managed very effectively.

Sri Swamiji says that we have to find out what our personal relationship with God is. How do we go about it?

There comes a time in a person's life, maybe due to maturity of the mind, when the search for self-satisfaction, the fulfilment of desires and ambitions, lose their grip. Whatever the reason, there is definitely a decline in personal effort to

achieve self-fulfilment. At that time, one should direct one's mind to the discovery of the Self. This is the beginning of the yogic process.

Through yoga, one can speed up the process of loosening the grip of desires and ambitions. One starts to rediscover one's self, to know the innermost programming of how one functions, how that programming can be made more efficient and creative, and how to develop the most subtle faculties.

After one has completed the process of yoga asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, the state of bhakti comes naturally. I do not mean bhakti in the religious or devotional sense, but in the sense of a natural acceptance of a higher will and an ability to surrender. When we do not accept a higher will, there is struggle. We try to create our own reality, to find our own rock where we can stop and be secure and safe. In order to find that rock and create our own reality, we struggle with our environment, culture, beliefs, lifestyle and mentality. That becomes our normal way of life.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, one does not have to make any effort to create one's own imaginative reality. One lives in the present reality which is created by the unseen powers beyond, and adapts to it. That is the essence of bhakti, to adapt to the natural reality which surrounds us, to understand and to live according to the principles of that natural reality. That is how we can develop a relationship with God.

God cannot be seen in an image or form, although creating an image of God, a figure that represents our own mentality may be the first step for many. What is the shape of gold, for example? Gold has no actual shape of its own. You can make three golden statues and call one Christ, one Rama and one Krishna. It is only an imaginative process of identifying with a higher reality. Should we identify with the form or with the essence of that form? The form can never be God, it can be an expression of God; however, the essence is the reality, the gold can take any form. We have

to identify with the gold. What form does mud have? None. Different items are made from mud, soil, earth, but the essence is mud.

In the same way, our *ishtha devata*, our object of contemplation, has a form, and a quality which is reflected in that form. Through that form we have to go to the essence. When we discover the essence we can live according to the law. Of course, there are many believers and non-believers who believe in one thing and not in another. These are all human traits. In order to manage these human traits, we have to discover a personal relationship with a form to which we are attracted.

Therefore, there are two ways of answering this question. If you belong to the category of people who are believers or disbelievers, you have to develop your own concept, identity and relationship with God. However, if you are a sadhaka, a yogi, and if through your own efforts you come to a point where you can realize you have to identify with the essence, the source, then the whole concept of developing a relationship with God takes a different turn.

Is a sannyasin a sevaka or a sadhaka?

A sannyasin is neither. If you want to label a sannyasin, then do not label him or her as either a sadhaka or a sevaka, but as a soldier. Sadhana and seva are mediums through which one can attain confidence, equilibrium, awareness and victory over oneself. What does a soldier do and what are the personality traits of a soldier? A soldier is not a loose-footed person. A soldier is a well-trained and well-disciplined person who knows the art of fighting, and whose aim is to win. Traditionally, sannyasins are taught how to obtain victory over the self. How many people fail the basic training is a different matter; however, the training of a sannyasin is that of a soldier, to be disciplined, to have a goal and aim, to be victorious in life. In order to achieve this goal, different methods or tools are utilized.

The first tool is satsang. It is not just listening to nice words and then forgetting them after one hour. *Satsang* is a way of enquiring into one's nature, of finding out the right way to live, think and act. How many of us actually imbibe the teaching of the satsang? Maybe none imbibe the teaching, because for us, satsang is just an intellectual pleasure. We like it. Beautiful things are said, but we never implement them in our lives or fully understand them. It just goes in one ear and out the other. This is a wrong understanding. Satsang is actually a tool for training the personality, for changing our way of thinking, lifestyle and understanding, and developing a homogeneous, higher vision.

The second tool is sadhana. *Sadhana* means the attainment of perfection, both internally and externally, becoming proficient in whatever we do. Sadhana refers to the training given to one's mind and emotions through meditation, japa and tapas. It is training towards perfection.

The third tool is seva. *Seva* or service through karma yoga, externally and internally, socially and spiritually, is a way through which we can channel the experiences of the senses, mind and ego. The aim of this process of channelling is to contribute effectively to the development of the environment and to the society in which we live.

The fourth tool is swadhyaya. *Swadhyaya* is self-study, awareness, understanding or knowledge of one's personality; acceptance of it, and transformation of its limiting aspects. This is the aim of swadhyaya.

These are the four tools that a sannyasin, as a soldier, uses to attain the goal of samarpan, surrender or dedication. *Samarpan* means homogeneous, balanced offering. An offering of the actions performed externally and internally, socially and spiritually, by the senses and emotions to the concept of divinity, and that divinity is not separate from the world, but a part and parcel of it. A sannyasin becomes very much a focal point for providing better and clearer direction for others.

Swamiji, could you tell us something about Sat Chandi Maha Yajna and the magnitude of it?

Chandi yajna is one of the most powerful tantric practices. It is worship of the Cosmic Mother. It involves the chanting of mantras which create power in the people participating, and also in the environment. Chandi yajna is one of the purest tantric ceremonies conducted universally. Vedantins, tantrics, yogis, householders and atheists, all follow this practice. Usually, the concept of tantra is associated with siddhis, with the power to dominate other people; however, that is not tantra at all. That is a deviated form of the techniques of one of the systems of tantra. The actual tantric practices are very subtle, simple and powerful.

Chandi yajna involves rituals to propitiate the different elements. The mantras and concentration awaken the forces of the individual mind. It is a ten-hour ritual with a short break in between for some fruit prasad. We expect ten to twelve thousand people a day to pass through for nine days. I cannot really talk about the magnitude of it because I think it has to be experienced personally.

Sri Swamiji never performed any yajnas or poojas previously. For the first time in his life he is involving himself in a pooja. Whatever the reason may be, he has a purpose for doing it which we do not know. That purpose will unfold in the course of time. I think that is more important than what happens on the physical plane.

What is the difference between vairagya and anasakti?

Raga is attraction and *asakti* is obsession. *Anasakti* is being free from obsession and *vairagya* is being free from attraction.

How is a mercury Shivalingam made?

There are only a few places in India where one can get shivalingams. One is the riverbed of the Narmada in central India. There you can get both white and black lingams. Then there is a mountain peak in South India, where you can get

black granite shivalingams. However, the most powerful form is the mercury lingam.

According to the tantric tradition, mercury is considered to be the sperm of Shiva. Generally, you find mercury only at a depth of twelve to fifteen thousand feet. There is a long process in the tantric tradition of purifying mercury in eighteen different stages because mercury is poisonous. This purification takes place with herbs and water which draw out the poison. Only people who know the process correctly can do it. We do not know the whole process.

One of the devotees completed seventeen purifications of the one we have in the ashram. It was my desire to have it for the Sat Chandi Maha Yajna. He could not finish the last purification, which had to be done with lemon juice; therefore we could not use it. Today, we have purified it with lemon juice and now it is to be polished.

On the day of the full moon, a special pooja will be conducted to invoke the force, *prana pratishtha*, of Shiva.

Swamiji, the international attendees of the Sat Chandi Maha Yajna want to give Sri Rama alarm clocks to all the swamis.

For that, the sannyasins will have to work a bit harder. You could call it my hang-up, but I want the sannyasins to be more self-disciplined and I feel they are not one hundred percent, for whatever reason. They are not making the right effort. They have determination. They have motivation. They have drive, but they also have lethargy. That lethargy has to go.

There are simple things which make an ashram, and many times the swamis cannot even do these simple things, like come to the morning chanting class. That is one example. Why? It is because they feel sleepy. Why? They did not feel like attending today. Despite their best intentions they are lethargic, and the swamis know I do not miss an opportunity to rebuke them. Nobody can remove that lethargy, but themselves. It is a question of sankalpa.

It is a question of willpower. If they do not have that much willpower, then what is the use of giving them a gift of a Sri Rama clock? They will wake up and turn it off and go back to sleep. When I find a sannyasin up to my expectations, then they will definitely get a Sri Rama clock.

We have a sannyasin here that used to do Hindi typing on the computer. Suddenly, one fine morning he comes and says, "I do not have to learn anything in the ashram. I have learned enough already in my house, and I am not going to do any work." I came to know of it today. I am going to give him the boot, because that sort of thing is not accepted in an ashram.

Sannyasins need to train themselves. They need to become like steel, not flowers. Externally, they should be like flowers. Internally they have to be very hard on themselves, though not on others.

There are four kinds of action or *purushartha* which we can do in life: actions for *artha*, financial and social security; *kama*, the fulfilment of desires and personal aspirations; *dharma*, right conduct; and *moksha*, illumination. If we cannot fulfil these four actions in whatever way possible when it is within our capacity, then we should not call ourselves sannyasins.

There should definitely be aspirations, we all have our aspirations; however, they have to be uplifting, sattwic, positive, harmonious and balanced. We have to differentiate between aspirations which can uplift us and those which will only create further conflict and generate further self-oriented desires. Wealth, security, why not? Wealth should not be for personal use. It has been given by the society for a specific purpose, for a specific cause, and it should be used for that aim.

This has been the principle of Sri Swamiji, too. He established this ashram, but when he walked out of the place his pockets were empty. He could have built a palatial house for himself in the Himalayas without telling anybody and lived in absolute luxury for the rest of his life, like many

have done. A few days ago some swamis came to visit him from the place of his vidya guru. He told them, “Never misappropriate or misuse the funds which the public has given, for your personal use. If you want to use it for your personal things, then work, earn money and use that, but not a single cent of the public money should be used for personal aspirations.”

The effort for security, whether financial or social, must be conducted by everyone, including the swamis. However, the attitude of the swamis and the use of the attainment have to be different. In fact, I am planning to start a course specifically for the sannyasins in different centres and ashrams called ABM, Ashram Business Management, as it is necessary to know how to manage and maintain the funds. They should know the parameters defined by our tradition: not to be used for the family, not to be used for my friend or somebody I like, but to be used for a purpose. That training is a must.

The third purushartha or action is for right conduct, dharma. Dharma is not just righteousness. Rather, it is the expression of the total personality, the harmonious expression of human nature with understanding and good will, without animosity, hatred, anger or jealousy. It is a process in which we need to become more involved if we want to contribute in a positive way to society.

Moksha, the fourth action, should be spontaneous. We can say that the first three actions lead naturally to moksha. When your attitude and aspirations are balanced, these three lead to the spontaneous attainment and expression of moksha. These are the only four actions which we need to undertake in our life.

I am sure that if the sannyasins apply their mind to learning, they can do a lot. Each one of them is a powerhouse, and when their power awakens you should see them, sparks fly, uncontrolled sparking and afterwards, ‘the fuse blows’. The wires have to be properly connected, the right fuse put in, and they have to allow me to do it.

How do we channel the pranas? For example, if there is too much samana, how can we realign it in relation to the koshas?

According to yoga there are five koshas. *Kosha* actually means level of experience, dimension or sheath. *Annamaya kosha* is the dimension of matter. *Pranamaya kosha* is the dimension or total experience of energy. *Manomaya kosha* is the total experience of mind. *Vijnanamaya kosha* is the total experience of higher or awakened intelligence. *Anandamaya kosha* is the experience of harmony, equilibrium, bliss and peace.

Now we are aware of the annamaya and manomaya koshas, which can be loosely called the body-mind unit, annamaya kosha representing the body, manomaya kosha representing the mind. We also have a partial understanding of pranamaya kosha, but no understanding of either vijnanamaya or anandamaya kosha.

Scientists and theoreticians speak of mind, consciousness, thoughts and feelings as being the subtle expression of the human personality or nature. Scientists have also tried to discover the nature and function of the material body, annamaya kosha, but only recently have people started to become aware of the pranic dimension. The pranic dimension is not a fully researched area at present. Yogis have talked about it, just as they have talked about vijnanamaya kosha, higher intelligence, and anandamaya kosha, the body of bliss; however, it has not yet percolated down to the grassroots level of society where there is still no understanding of the concept of prana or of vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas.

The pranamaya kosha or the pranic experience can be had when you enter into deep meditative states, when you have perfected concentration to such an extent that there are no distractions or dissipations. You can tune yourself to the frequencies of the energy that is in and around the body and in the universe.

Although we talk of energy, or *prana* in the form of life force, as being the vitality, warmth or electromagnetic field

of the body, that is not prana. We may talk of prana in these terms because that is the level of our present understanding, but prana is something more subtle than these modern-day concepts. It is recognizing life, not in the form of consciousness, creation or manifestation, but in the form of energy. To come to this level of understanding of energy one has to go through the meditative process and beyond the manifest structures of mind and body.

I have always conceived prana as being like the neutral gear of a car. In a car you have first, second, third and fourth gears and then you have neutral. When you move from first to second, second to third, and third to fourth gears, you move through neutral. In the same way when you go from the annamaya level of experience to the manomaya level you go through pranamaya kosha or neutral gear. When you go from manomaya to vijnanamaya you again go through pranamaya, neutral. When you go from vijnanamaya to anandamaya again you have to go through the neutral pranamaya. Pranamaya kosha is the link between the other four koshas. In the absence of prana it would be impossible to move from one level of experience into another.

Although yogic terminology places pranamaya as the second stage in the structure of the koshas, it is only a symbolic representation of an all-pervasive energy field which links the gross with the subtle, the causal and transcendental bodies or planes of consciousness. Prana is like the thread which connects all the beads in a mala and holds them together, and the concept of prana also changes as you move from one kosha to another.

It is very difficult to define what prana and pranamaya kosha are. Normally, when we talk about prana we talk of the vitality that is experienced in the body and mind; however, as we go deeper into the discovery of our own nature, mind and consciousness, prana becomes very subtle. The energy in the chakras is more subtle than the prana which we normally experience in our physical body. The awakening of kundalini is the awakening of prana, although it is more subtle.

Kundalini awakening is more subtle than the awakening of the chakras. Each awakening or level of experience is more subtle than the previous one.

For our understanding, the concept of prana being the life force is enough. This life force, when manifesting in the physical body, is in the form of prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana. These are the *pancha vayus*, the five vital airs which are responsible for the maintenance, preservation and motion of the physical structure. Prana at the psychic level, in relation to the chakras, gives birth to altered states of consciousness and energy. Prana is a very vast subject. It is not possible to describe it in ten minutes; however, this will give you a very basic understanding of how yoga views energy.

There are so many different types of yoga. What is your particular system called?

There have been many different approaches to yoga. Different people have called their system by different names such as traditional yoga, scientific yoga, holistic yoga and so forth. In our tradition Swami Sivananda's yoga was known as 'integral yoga', encompassing all the aspects of yoga for the homogeneous growth of body, mind, emotion and spirit. Sri Swamiji also called his yoga, integral yoga, but with more emphasis on scientific experience and experiment.

In the time of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda such labelling was necessary, because when Swami Sivananda taught yoga fifty years ago, people had no concept of yoga whatsoever. Swami Sivananda decided to bring yoga out from its mystical environment and adapt it to suit the people of his era. Swami Satyananda took Swami Sivananda's concept of yoga one step further, and in order to validate what the yogic traditions have always spoken about, he emphasized the role of scientific research.

These days I prefer to use the term 'classical yoga' to denote a combination of the traditional and the scientific, because the word 'tradition' evokes a different kind of

image today than it did previously. The word 'science' also evokes a different kind of image. Science today is definitely not equipped to validate all the claims of yoga. It has not yet developed to the extent where it can measure the subtlety of prana, even with the help of Kirlian photography. It can measure the electrical emissions of the body, the positive and negative fields, but there is no equipment to measure the subtle states of energy. Science cannot measure kundalini or the chakras. Valid and useful attempts have been made; however, they have only defined a fraction of the whole.

Science has neither the equipment nor the level of knowledge to experiment with yoga. You can experiment with pranayama because it deals with the breath and with asanas as they stimulate, alter and affect the function and performance of the internal body organs and systems. You will have difficulty, however, in measuring or validating the claims of yogis in relation to mudras and bandhas, because they stimulate the subtle fields of energy. You will also have difficulty experimenting with states of meditation and samadhi.

Even modern psychology has not been able to define consciousness clearly, or to know what the functions, attributes and areas of experience of the unconscious are. There is a big gap when it comes to learning yoga, about all the effects of yoga scientifically-speaking. In fact, it is not possible. If you want to potter around with some equipment to measure muscle tension, breath rate, pulse rate, blood pressure and brain waves, you are free to do so. However, thousands of other people have already done that and have come to better conclusions than you may be able to arrive at.

Keeping this in mind, we have to develop a synthesis of traditional and scientific yoga. This synthesis combines classical yoga where we must know the concepts, theories and principles behind the yogic techniques and areas of experience. We have to bide our time in order to see the scientific truths in these concepts. Simultaneously, we

should try to understand the traditional concepts in modern language, and utilize available scientific knowledge.

I will tell you a story and allow you to reach your own conclusions. One day an ant was out taking a morning walk. It climbed on to a table on which there was a piece of white paper. Of course, the ant did not know it was paper; just that it was something white. So it went on an adventure of discovery. It started to walk around and discovered an instrument which was drawing something on that white sheet, flowing black designs, writing, pictures, images, something which the ant could not understand, but it was a big event for the ant.

The ant rushed back to the ant colony and requested the president call a meeting because he had discovered something unique. He started describing what he had seen, “This morning when I went for my morning walk, I came upon a beautiful white piece of something. On top of it I saw an instrument which was drawing in black images.” You can imagine what it was. A pen was writing on a piece of paper.

Now the president of the ant colony was a more experienced ant, so he said, “That instrument by itself is not capable of motion. If you had looked more closely, you would have found something soft holding that instrument.”

The next day another ant went to discover what that ‘something soft’ was, and that is how they discovered fingers. Then they discovered that the fingers were attached to something else, which was known as the hand. Then they discovered that the hand was attached to an arm, the arm to a body, and finally they discovered the feet, which of course, were not responsible for the writing. In yoga we have to go through a process of discovery in much the same way. Yogic discovery cannot be confined to scientific discovery alone. Yoga has to be discovered gradually; it is experiential.

Once the chakras and nadis are open, do they stay open?

Kundalini yoga says that ida and pingala keep on changing. Sushumna awakening is the outcome of ida and pingala

becoming active together. In advanced yoga, the awakening of sushumna normally happens for a short time. When sushumna awakens, even for a short time, the mental attitude changes dramatically. One can become extremely positive or extremely negative.

Prior to the awakening of the chakras we have to work with ida, pingala and sushumna nadis in order to awaken them. Before the chakras can awaken, the energy blocks have to be removed. Once the energy blocks are removed from the nadis, the prana awakens. Then the chakras awaken, and after that, kundalini. When we work with the chakras, sushumna is active all the time; however, until the awakening of the pranic force, it keeps on changing.

Is it necessary in this modern world for all people to enter spiritual life?

Yes, and I will give one example of how the yogic tradition views life by telling you a story. There used to be a family living on a farm in the jungle. One day the mother had to go to the city for some work, so she told her son, "Son, while I am away in the city look after the plants and trees on the farm." She stayed in the city for about one week, and when she came back to the farm she saw that all the trees were drooping. She asked her son, "Did you look after the trees or not?" The son replied, "Yes mother, every day I took a cloth and cleaned the dust from the leaves. I sprayed the flowers with perfume and shined all the fruit. I also removed the bugs from the trunks." The mother said to him, "Did you water the trees?" The child answered, "No, I never did that." So the mother explained to the child that it is the root which is the most important aspect of the tree and if the roots do not receive water, the tree will die.

We can apply this to ourselves. This body is our tree trunk, our senses are the branches, our thoughts and desires are the leaves and fruit, and our roots are hidden underground in the realm of the spirit. Our education does not give us any opportunity to realize the nature of this spirit

and therefore, we lack mental discipline and self-control. We give importance to the body and recognition to the mind; however, we neglect the knowledge of the spirit, thinking it is just philosophical.

According to yoga, harmony between body, mind and spirit is the most important thing. Awareness of spirit has to be developed in the same way that we develop the mind. The spirit has to be realized; otherwise it is just a matter for philosophical speculation.

The ancient traditions, whether yoga, tantra, Vedanta or Shintoism, emphasized the necessity for nature and spirit to be viewed and developed together. We need to change our attitude and approach in relation to spirit.

What do you think about the concept of life in relation to all beings?

It is all a play of consciousness and there is an aspect of intelligence in every form of life. A single cell in the body does not have a physical brain or mind, but it does have a form of intelligence. It takes birth, grows, divides, multiplies and dies. Whether it is a single cell amoeba or the complex human structure, everything is guided by one intelligence, and that intelligence evolves in each form of existence. At one level, that intelligence is instinctive; it simply reacts to a situation. At another level it is rational.

Intelligence is tamasic, rajasic or sattwic. We work in these levels of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*, moving from *tamas*, the closed nature, to *sattwa*, the nature of light. As we evolve, and *sattwa* is awakened, we enter into the *lokas*. In animal, insect or bird life, there is also a movement from *tamas* to *sattwa*, and you can see their nature very distinctly. They are guided by this nature. Animals also have chakras. Their level of existence is known as *patala*. In human beings the levels are called *chakras*.

In yoga, there are twenty-one levels of consciousness. Therefore, there is a continuous progression of life according to the yogic theory of evolution.

How is it that yoga was born in India and not other countries?

Actually, it is not true that yoga originated in India. Our organization did some research work into the other civilizations, especially the 'dead' civilizations in South America, Europe and Egypt. I was in South America for many years looking at the Mayan and Aztec cultures and saw their old statues of asanas. I came across the book *Popul Vuh*, which is like their traditional religious book. In it they have described practices of meditation, trataka and crystal gazing. These civilizations existed approximately five thousand years ago. We also found a lot of evidence that showed yoga was once a very dominant practice in the Scandinavian countries.

We believe that, due to the political environment or natural calamities like floods and fires, the concept and tradition of yoga was lost. The credit goes to India for preserving that knowledge and for reviving it again in this age; however, it used to be a worldwide culture.

What is your view about reincarnation? Do you believe in it or not?

I neither believe in it nor deny it. I will give you one example of a British woman who came to the ashram suffering from a lot of headaches. At that time our guru, Sri Swamiji, was here. The woman had gone to the specialists throughout the world to find a cure for her headaches. Sri Swamiji looked at her and said only one thing, "If you trust me, don't take any medicine." She answered, "Okay, I trust you. I will not take any medicine."

When she stopped taking the medicines the pain increased more and more and more. There was a time when she used to scream at night and one day she fainted because of the pain. When she woke up she did not have any pain. We asked her what had happened, why she did not have headaches any more after her fainting spell, and she related a unique experience.

When she fainted she had a dream in which she saw a man working inside a coal mine. There was a very loud rumbling noise. The man looked up and saw that the ceiling was falling. It collapsed on his head and he died. His last experience was of the pain in his head. We believe that in her past life she was that man working inside the coal mine, and that during the accident her last memory or impression was of the terrible pain in the head.

In this life, in order to release that painful memory she was experiencing a continuous headache in the body of a female. When she relived that experience in the form of a dream, she released that memory and the pain went away. When we see such things happen, then we can believe that there is a link with our past and present lives.

From a scientific standpoint, if you look at the DNA structure, you can see so much information. That precise information must have been carried from some other life into this one. It could also be a genetic transfer or an occurrence when the soul enters into the womb, but whatever the explanation, there is a link with our past.

The yogic tradition is silent on this subject. It says that consciousness keeps on evolving; however, consciousness will only evolve once it has fulfilled its area of experience in a particular dimension, just as in school we move from class one to class two and then three. Scientifically speaking, in practical terms there is reincarnation whether scientists or religious people believe in it or not! Our nature depends on past karma and is defined according to our past lives.

Many say that God is one, but there are so many gods in this world. Why is it so?

This is very problematic. God is definitely one, and represents the highest qualities of existence or *Brahman*, the evolved being. At the same time, however, there are many devas. The word *deva* means a being made of light. In each stage of life the quality which we express is a deva. I may be

a very good person. That quality of goodness is a deva, an illumined example.

In order for people to identify with one impersonal God, they need a symbol. It is like saying that air is everywhere, but we call it by different names like wind, thunder, storm, and so on, which are manifestations of the same air in different situations. In the same way, we have created images or symbols of God to suit our need; actually though, the ultimate experience of God is formless. The ultimate experience of God is, 'I and my Father are one'. Gold is one thing, but out of the same substance we can make a ring, a necklace or earrings and give each a different name. Similarly, we create an image of God with which we can identify, although God is one all-pervading presence.

Even people who have had mystical experiences begin to identify with the symbol which enabled them to have that experience. This causes confusion in many people's minds because their idea of God is only one; however, if they analyze it more deeply, they will see that these different forms are only a means of self-expression, just as a child makes something out of clay and loves it very much because it is his or her own creation. The master sculptor knows that it is only a very basic form, when in reality you can do much more with clay.

It is up to us to discover our relationship with God. Whether He is our friend, father, mother or master, each of us has our own personal relationship.

We all wear many masks and play different roles while trying to find our true identity. At what point does that identity cease to be a mask, when freedom of spirit is gained and we no longer have to live up to an image?

A mask is not a mask any more when you become what the mask symbolizes. If there are still questions regarding the life you are leading, or you have put on a mask but still wish to find a better one, then you can be sure that you are still searching for the right mask in which you can become

yourself. As long as we are life members of this creation, *prakriti*, we have to wear different masks.

Whether you are a sannyasin, priest, politician or doctor, the moment you begin to derive full enjoyment from, and express yourself with absolute ease in that situation, then the identity or image of the mask becomes you and, actually, that is moksha. Throughout our life we try to get something better and we are generally dissatisfied with whatever we have. It is that dissatisfaction which makes us adopt different masks all the time.

Moksha is actually overcoming the dissatisfaction in life. Kaivalya or nirvana is overcoming dissatisfaction in life. Whether you achieve that as an ordinary person living in society or as a renunciate is your choice; however, once you have made the choice it is advisable to live it fully, to experience the nature, quality, beauty, and the creativity that a mask can express.

As long as you have a body and are utilizing the faculties of the senses, mind, emotions and intellect, try to be balanced in your approach. This is the whole process of yoga. If you are an artist, be an artist. If you are a dancer, be a dancer. If you are a farmer, be a farmer. If you are a technician, be that, but live your life fully, not partially. In this way, one can manage the karmas and awaken the aspect of *viveka*, right understanding. With *viveka*, enlightenment is possible. One cannot become enlightened, perfect and peaceful until one applies *viveka* in life. The application of *viveka* is the final mask that you have to put on.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna that only those who are balanced in pain and pleasure, who have controlled their passions, ambitions and the play of raga and dwesha, are the true *bhaktas*, or devotees. Some people may take this in a religious sense, but if you look at it critically, you will come to know that the instruction Krishna gives Arjuna is that he should live a life full of *viveka*. Consequently, his karmas and thoughts will be balanced and his creativity will become fully functional.



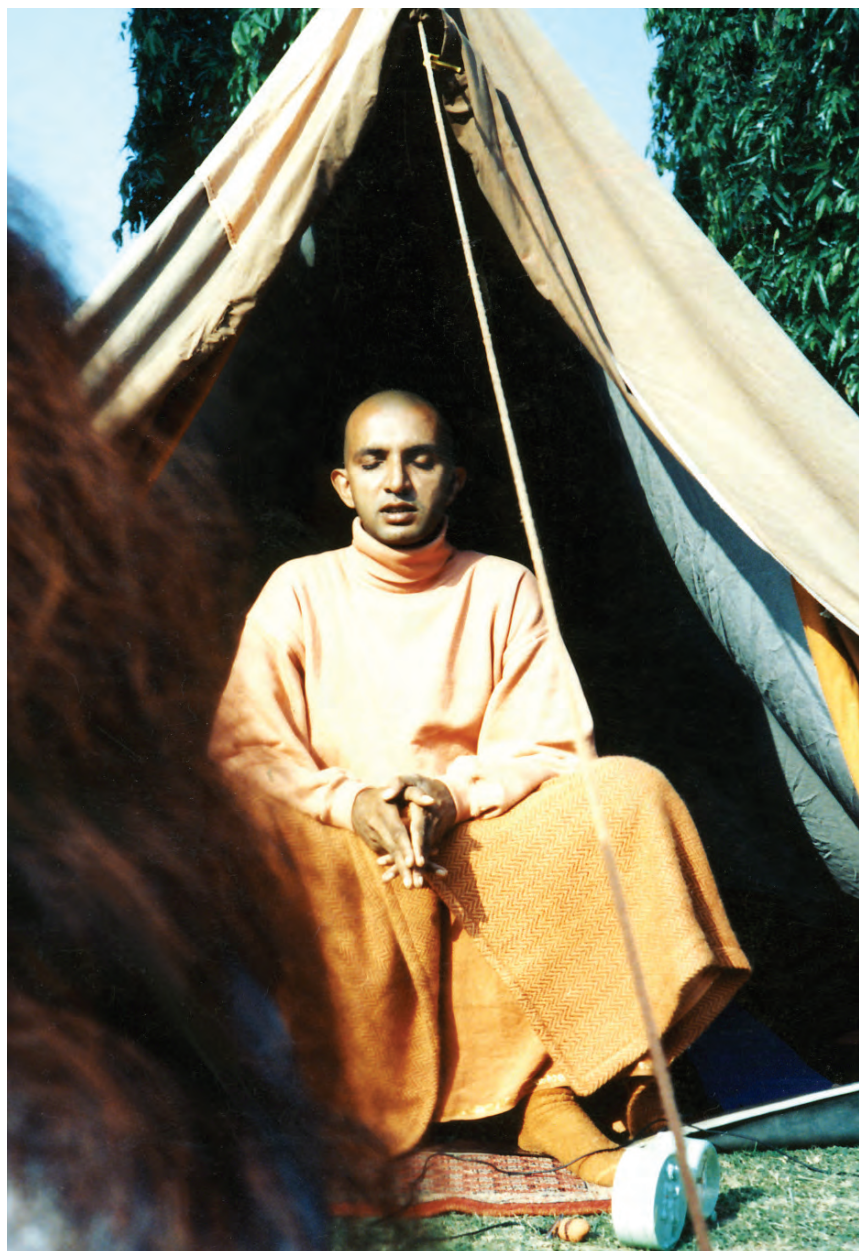














Thus, to my understanding, viveka is the last mask. Once you put on the mask of viveka, the faculty of discrimination between right and wrong, real and unreal governs your life and you find satisfaction and enjoyment.

How can one experience the wholeness and completeness of yoga and of sannyasa?

When you travel somewhere you have to take the proper means of transport. If you are coming from Sydney or London to Munger, the plane is not going to take you directly. It will first take you to Calcutta, Delhi or Bombay. From there, you will need to take another mode of transport. Yoga is also a mode of transport which can take us so far, but in order to go beyond a particular destination, we will require different vehicles according to our mentality, personality and lifestyle.

Ramana Maharshi had perfected yoga, and after he had reached a plateau of experience through yoga, when he had become an avadhuta and needed to further his experiences, he came to the path of bhakti. Swami Vivekananda had perfected yoga, but after that he perfected the path of karma.

Sri Swamiji perfected yoga and then followed the path of tapasya, not even bhakti. In fact, people are mistaken when they say he is preaching bhakti. He is not preaching bhakti. Bhakti is just an expression of his lifestyle, which is *tapasya*, austerity. He performed the panchagni sadhana and his anushtana for so many years. He is doing it even to this day, from twelve midnight until six in the morning, he is practising his sadhana. We are not aware of what he is doing because we are sleeping. Sri Swamiji has followed the path of tapasya, and everyone who reaches a point of fulfilment through yoga follows a different path according to their dharma and karma.

To reach the fulfilment or completeness of yoga, a few things are necessary.

The first is sincerity of practice. Make yoga a part of your lifestyle, just like sleeping and eating. Yoga is not something

which is done for half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening. You have to think and live yoga.

The second is discipline of the inner being. Only when you have inner discipline can you experience freedom in discipline, because discipline is not an imposition of rules. Rules are only the guidelines by which you learn to observe your personal, emotional, mental, rational and irrational actions, reactions and interactions.

I can assure you that you will not be able to achieve this self-discipline if you are loose and go with the sway of the mind. You have to be a very strong person to do that. Ashram life helps to make one strong, especially in Munger. I know some of you do not like the discipline which you find here. That level of strictness is needed in order to discipline and focus the internal being.

Socially, you may call this a dictatorial attitude. I do not mind. You may call me Hitler, but I do not mind. Hitler lost anyway, and I wish to lose so that all of you can experience what inner discipline is. An ashram is a place where you learn to become immune to many things. So, internal discipline is the second item required in order to experience the wholeness of yoga.

The third factor regarding thinking and living yoga is purity of intention. Your intention has to be clear and pure.

The fourth is having a suitable lifestyle based on spiritual principles, not on the whims of the mind. To wake up at eight o'clock and have tea in bed, to lead a lethargic lifestyle, that is not the purpose at all! A suitable lifestyle is one which is conducive to your mental, emotional and spiritual growth.

These four factors allow us to experience the wholeness and completeness of yoga and sannyasa. Sannyasa is not just shaving the head and wearing geru. Sannyasa is the concept of discipline and dedication, and service with compassion and love. Sannyasa is commitment to a cause for the upliftment of others.

Could you elaborate on rishi sannyasa and marriage?

I do not have the faintest idea about marriage. I have no personal experience with it, and when I see married people I thank God for not having given me that opportunity. I have never been able to understand why people marry. I guess it must be for some form of emotional, physical and social security. Mutual support and security form the basis of marriage. That is all right, there are people who need that. We seek only a few things in society: friendship, love and recognition. Recognition we can get through our job, friendship we can get through our friends, and love we can get through our husband or wife.

Now, I will say something about sannyasa, not in terms of the Hindu, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist or any other tradition, but in terms of a concept where you become a sannyasin after undergoing training. Sannyasa is actually re-education. It is inner discipline combined with awareness and the principles of *viveka*, discrimination, *vichara*, contemplation, and *vairagya*, non-attachment. It is a process which one goes through as part of the training.

Many people are able to reach the end of the training and many are not, it is as simple as that. Even in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna, “There are many people who think about me. Out of those a few actually try to obtain me. Out of the many who try to obtain me, a few actually know how to come to me. Out of the many who know how to come to me, there are only a few who get a glimpse of me. Out of those who get a glimpse of me, very few attain me.”

When we take sannyasa, our aim is very pure and pious and we try to live up to that, but our social, cultural, religious and family training and samskaras become dominant after one or two years, and we get caught up in our old ways again. Although we are living a lifestyle in the ashram which is similar to sannyasa, we are not actually experiencing the sannyasa lifestyle. Therefore, to find a true sannyasin here is practically impossible, but we can still

maintain the sincerity of our inspiration and dedication. We can keep on working and walking at our own pace, and hopefully, with the grace of God, we will come to our goal in the course of time.

In the sannyasa tradition there are different levels of experience. Even in sannyasa we go through the brahmacharya, grihastha and vanaprastha stages. Maybe the sannyasa stage will come afterwards, when we go into retirement, live in seclusion and do our own sadhana, like Sri Swamiji. This can only happen after our karmas are exhausted and we have overcome our personal aspirations and ambitions to be recognized. Deep down, there is a desire for recognition, love, affection and friendship. These are the instinctive desires which everybody has. In sannyasa, this is what we work through. Only after exhaustion of samskaras and karmas, when they no longer have a grip on our mind and actions, will we become sannyasins, and not before.

Apart from this, there are stages of sannyasa in the tradition: living in the ashram of the guru, wandering as a mendicant, becoming a teacher, initiating other people and becoming a guru, and finally leaving everything. These first stages in the sannyasa tradition are known as kutichaka, bahudaka, hamsa, and paramahansa.

Sannyasa has been a closed tradition, in the sense that not everybody knows the ultimate purpose of sannyasa. The majority of sannyasins are what is known as the 'seasonal sannyasins'. When they come to the ashram they put on their geru, and when they go out they wear civvies. In seasonal sannyasa there are too many distractions in different directions, and it becomes difficult to maintain a focus with all the dissipation. If one can maintain purity of thought, commitment to a cause, and personal discipline, then even in seasonal sannyasa, you can experience the benefits of sannyasa.

Actually, Sri Swamiji started off by initiating people into karma sannyasa. You may not be a full sannyasin, you may not be able to devote yourself with absolute sincerity because of

the changing environment, family, society and mind; however, you can definitely maintain the identity of a sannyasin. You can live the sannyasa lifestyle as much as possible, and be introduced to the concept of karma sannyasa.

When I came in 1983, I found that some more preparation was needed before people became karma sannyasins. A code of conduct was also needed to guide them in the process of sannyasa. Therefore, I introduced jignasu sannyasa as the first step, karma sannyasa as the second step, and poorna sannyasa as the third.

Rishi is the ancient tradition of this country, in which the whole family lives the sannyasa ideal. More specifically, the husband and wife live a spiritual life supporting each other in their own evolutionary process. There are many people who live that kind of life, but who do not qualify as sannyasins because the sannyasa tradition says a sannyasin has to be single. I introduced rishi sannyasa for those people who are living like sannyasins but who could not be called sannyasins because they were living together, even though they may have absolute purity of heart and mind, and have dedicated their life to the service of yoga and guru.

Thus, the concept of rishi sannyasa came about to encourage the process of sannyasa in their lives. You cannot ask for it. You can only ask for jignasu and karma sannyasa. That is your right, and it is my right either to give you initiation or not. You can ask, but whether you receive initiation or not is a different matter. It is my right to give poorna and rishi sannyasa to anybody whom I think fit, and in whom I see a spark of sannyasa burning bright.

There are psychological warfare tactics used in the army. Would you please explain how the enemy could be defeated with such techniques and how psychological methods can help in the betterment of societies and individuals?

I think this question is being asked because I recently mentioned that sannyasins are soldiers. No, unfortunately

I cannot answer this question because I do not know the kind of techniques used by the army in psychological warfare. Frankly speaking, to this day I have not been able to understand how people can be brainwashed and act according to that brainwashing. The kind of psychological tactics that are used to harm other people and boost one's negative self-image represent the actions of a very weak mind.

I have not the faintest idea how psychological warfare works. I can only answer from the yogic point of view. Every human being has intelligence, emotions, beliefs and feelings that manifest according to their nature and samskaras. Through meditation, introspection, self-observation and self-awareness, it becomes possible to realize the personal nature.

The aim of yoga is to harmonize the uncontrolled emanations of the mind and its nature. With the practice of yoga, you can actually give a proper direction to your intelligence, emotions, belief system and feelings. You can give them the right environment so that through their own wisdom and experience they can mature.

What is the element in kirtan that is supposed to alter one's state of consciousness?

When kirtan is done correctly, it can help raise the emotions to such an extent that the intellect can be bypassed and *bhava samadhi*, or ecstasy through harmony, can be attained. We used to sing kirtan in the past where one kirtan would continue for hours, and many of us would be unconscious on the floor due to the high energy. It has happened in the ashram and even when we were travelling and singing in the back of a truck. The ecstasy which can be experienced through the harmony of emotions is a very powerful state which has been called *bhava samadhi*. To boost the energy level of kirtan you have to have a feeling for it. You need to be able to give your heart, head and soul to the kirtan.

What is a psychic symbol?

Many years ago Carl Jung wrote a book called *Man and His Symbols*. He claimed that the unconscious of the individual retains many impressions in the form of symbols. He was simply confirming what yogis have always said, that in our greater mind we retain certain impressions, some which are religious and some which are cultural. Christians who meditate may suddenly see an image of a cross, Mother Mary or the sacred heart coming up out of the blue. They may be total non-believers but because of the religious impressions in their mind these particular symbols may come up. It happens with the Hindus of different sects also. They may never go to a temple or know what they are supposed to do there; however, the religious education which they have imbibed makes them see the face or image of Shiva, Kali, Rama, Durga or Krishna in their meditation. That is one form of symbol, the religious impression.

There are also cultural or social symbols and in tantra you will find a wide variety of them. There are subconscious and unconscious symbols in tantra in the form of yantras and mandalas. In meditation, as you go deep inside your being, changes take place. As the mind and energy patterns change, it is like turning a kaleidoscope and you see different images. These images which come up from deep inside are the yantras and mandalas which represent states of consciousness or qualities of human nature.

In the course of time, the psychic symbol manifests in deeper states of meditation. Initially, in order to focus ourselves and get away from different kinds of religious, cultural and social impressions in the subconscious, we take up a symbol which is non-aligned, like a flower which represents beauty, a flame which represents light, or a star. These non-aligned symbols are used in the initial stages of meditation to provide a point of focus and act as a catalyst to take us deeper into our personality.

Later on, the symbol we have been using suddenly changes into a yantra or mandala, and we experience a

combination of colours, forms and shapes. We can then consider that we have gone beyond the superficial mental impressions. As Sri Swamiji has always said, the actual symbol will appear by itself, but in order to aid the process, we adopt a symbol which is non-aligned. If you stick to the symbol you have been given maybe the real one will come up in the course of time.

I have heard that there are not only visual psychic symbols but also sound psychic symbols. Can your psychic symbol also be the chirping of a bird?

You are talking about nada yoga symbols. These psychic symbols actually relate to pranamaya kosha as a vibration, the chirping of birds or the sound of bells; however, the actual psychic symbol is visual. In manomaya kosha you have all the social, religious, cultural and other symbols. In vijñanamaya kosha you have the yantras and mandalas. In anandamaya kosha new symbols come. However, in pranamaya kosha you have the auditory symbols.

How can yoga be fulfilled without yama and niyama? Why are the yamas and niyamas eliminated from the yoga practices?

Yama and niyama have never been eliminated from the yoga practices. In the traditional ashtanga yoga, yama and niyama are placed first, asana and pranayama next, then pratyahara and dharana, and finally come dhyana and samadhi. This was the system defined by Sage Patanjali at a time when the pressures of life, the culture, society, people's needs and their lifestyle were different from what they are today.

Everything was different in those days. If you look at the direction in which people's aspirations are moving today, you will find that we concern ourselves more with our body than our mind. After that, a few people begin to think of their spiritual life, otherwise people generally ignore the true concept of spirituality.

Now asana and pranayama have taken first place, so that the body can be balanced, harmonized, kept in tip-top condition, healthy and free from disease. In order to overcome stress, improve concentration, retention power and creativity, people practise pratyahara and dharana. This is how people have taken to yoga today, but if we want to apply yoga to our lives, in the Yoga Sutras of Swan it is said, "Practise asana and pranayama first, pratyahara and dharana next, and when the mind is more focused, centred, balanced and harmonious, its expression will change spontaneously. Then you will begin to practise yama and niyama as the third stage. After the perfection of yama and niyama, which will induce a change in the pattern of consciousness, you can move into dhyana and samadhi."

Yama and niyama cannot be eliminated from yoga. I do not see them as practices, but as states of consciousness which one attains through the practice of yoga. For example, *satya*, truthfulness. Normally when you ask people to be truthful it is in relation to other people, "When you speak, tell the truth." However, we do not teach anyone how to be truthful to themselves. We may speak the truth, but are we truthful to ourselves? Do we hide from ourselves? Do we hide our complexes, guilt and inhibitions? Yes, we do! We never accept them. So, while we are speaking the truth through our lips and mouth, we are actually never following the truth in our lives.

We may speak about *ahimsa*, non-violence, in relation to other beings, but are we non-violent inside? Is there an absence of violence in our personality, thoughts, actions and feelings? No! There is violence in belief. There are contradictions. Thus, one cannot be free from violence until a change takes place in the normal pattern of consciousness. When that change takes place, we will automatically and naturally follow the true concept of yamas and niyamas.

Yama and niyama should be experienced as actual states, and not just as disciplines. Once they are experienced as states of consciousness, you move into dhyana without any

effort. An absence of violence from your personality will take you into dhyana and samadhi spontaneously. There will be no contradictions, no conflicts inside. You will be focused, centred, balanced and harmonious. Satya alone will take you to dhyana, or asteya, aparigraha, brahmacharya or any of the other niyamas. Once they become part of your consciousness, they change the quality of your life.

Do not think of yama and niyama as being different from you. They are part of you. Asana and pranayama are not part of you. They are something you have to make an effort to do. Pratyahara is not part of you; you have to make an effort to practise it. It is not natural. Dharana is also not part of you, but yama and niyama are part of your consciousness. They are an expression of your consciousness when it is in a state of harmony.

Why does the body suddenly jump during yoga nidra, and why should we remove all metal objects from the body?

When you practise techniques of pratyahara, of which yoga nidra is one, where you withdraw yourself from the outside world and focus internally, the structures of the body begin to realign themselves. In the process of realignment the energy movement changes in the body. Muscles physically change their position. Ligaments, nerves and tendons actually shift and come into their right position. These are some of the effects of the relaxation process which we know about.

While this realignment process is taking place and tensions are being released, the body goes through certain movements. You may suddenly feel a big jerk in the legs, arms, head or different parts of the body. These jerks actually represent the realignment of the body and prana.

Metal attracts any form of energy, whether electricity or the magnetic field of any object. Metal has a lot of attraction. If there are fillings in the teeth, sometimes during yoga nidra you experience electric currents in them. If you are wearing rings and other metal ornaments you can feel a current or a

shock. Therefore, it is always recommended that whenever you practise meditation or pratyahara, it is better to remove every kind of metal object from the body so it does not block or attract the flow of energy.

You have described some of the negative effects of the kriya yoga practices. If anything negative does happen when we have resumed our normal lifestyle outside the ashram, what should we do?

I have described the negative aspects because you need to remember that things can go wrong, therefore you have to be very careful right from the initial stages. I am not a salesman. Frankly speaking, regarding yoga I am interested in the quality, not the quantity of practitioners. I am interested in people who can apply theories and practices, and not just sit gooey-eyed waiting for something to happen.

You see, human nature, personality and the mind are very intricate. If I ask you, “Have you understood yourself?” and you have to give me an accurate and sincere answer, what will it be? Do you know your personality? Do you know your mind? Do you know the manifestation of prana and the positive and negative results of that manifestation? The answer you would have to give to these questions would have to be, “No, I don’t know.”

There has to be some form of balance in our approach to the different practices of yoga. How do we achieve this balance? We achieve this balance by knowing the things that can go wrong with our personality in the process of practice. We know that fire burns, but have we stopped using fire? No. We have only become more careful in our use of it. If someone lights a cigarette in bed, he puts it out before he falls asleep, otherwise there will be a fire.

Things like this are instinctive responses to prevent certain conditions from occurring. Likewise, in yoga you have to develop an instinctive response based on knowledge or *jnana*. Once you are aware of the pros and cons of a practice, your knowledge of how to handle different conflicting

situations will be more powerful and clear, rather than just thinking, “This has happened, what am I to do now?” This is what I am trying to make you aware of when I say that negative things can and do happen in the absence of an adequate understanding of your own nature.

In the kriya and kundalini practices we are not dealing with the superficial, manifest nature, behaviour and mentality, but with the deeper and more subtle nature. The yogic concept of the human personality consists of annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, vijñanamaya kosha and anandamaya kosha. We relate only with annamaya kosha and have no understanding of pranamaya or manomaya kosha. Of these five areas, we only deal with, relate to, and interact in one. The remaining four are unknown to us. We may have some concept of them, but it is only superficial; we have no experiential understanding. Therefore, in the absence of experience, it is advisable to be aware of the things that can go wrong, so that you are careful from the very beginning.

I do not mean to frighten anyone, so I will tell you about the positive aspects of kriya yoga. First, let us look at pranamaya kosha, the second dimension of personality. Activation of the pranic force leads to the development of healing abilities. This pranic energy can be used to heal the wounds of our mind, emotions and life. The benefits in manomaya kosha, the third dimension of personality, include greater clarity of thought, a balanced expression of emotions, and a reduction of ego. We gain a deeper understanding of different conditions and situations, and have great creativity in the realms of *buddhi* or intellect, and *kriya* or action.

If we go deeper into the benefits, we come to vijñanamaya kosha, the fourth dimension of the personality. Here we will find that the tamasic and rajasic tendencies become less, and that there is clarity of cognition, unconditioned cognition. With this clarity of cognition we begin to experience the subtle expressive nature of transcendental consciousness, and there can even come a point where siddhis begin to manifest naturally and

spontaneously. In this way there are positive, creative and sattwic results from the practices of kriya yoga. As you come to a different dimension of your personality, you will find a new expression within it which will be more creative and conducive to the transformation of your consciousness.

However, I would still advise caution in the practice of kriya yoga. You have to develop the strength to deal with the power of the waves which you will find on the surface of the ocean, the mind. You have to develop knowledge of the path in order to deal with the states which come when the external cognitive faculties stop and inner cognitive faculties begin. You should not be afraid of this caution; however, understand it to be a reality of life. Normally, we tend to identify with the extreme conditions and situations, and less with the balanced and harmonious ones. If you are in a balanced, harmonious state, and progressing without any chronic effect to the mind, you feel you are not progressing at all, because you are expecting something extreme to happen.

Only this morning somebody told me, "In my family everyone gets some kind of vision in their meditation practice, but I have not been able to get any kind of visions in my practice. Why?" The answer I gave was, "Your family members are going to extremes. One day they see the devil, the next day they see angels, but you are going in the right direction. You are not moving in extremes, you are progressing because you have greater concentration, fixation and one-pointedness of attention", but that person was not willing to accept my answer. So what can I do?

We identify with extremes because they jolt the consciousness. If I say that with the practice of kriya yoga you will be able to read other people's thoughts, see things that are happening thousands of miles away, tomorrow everyone will be in the class, hoping to attain that siddhi instantaneously. Why not? Tele-transportation of the body, "Beam me up Scotty", and we are in another place. However, if I say that you will become sex maniacs with burnt out brains I think everyone would stop going to the

class because of fear. But that only happens in extreme cases. Extremes do not normally happen, but it is good to be aware that they can.

Can we see the psychic level at which a person stands? Is it possible to know the location of one's kundalini after having gained an elementary knowledge during the kriya yoga course?

Before you can actually experience anything you have to reach a certain level of sensitivity. The pranic body, the subtle body and the koshas are only experienced by an aspirant after the perception has been sensitized to feel something subtle. In the elementary practices of kriya yoga it is definitely not going to be possible. You will have to remove many veils before you can see the pranic and subtle bodies.

The most important thing here is your commitment to the practice of the kriyas. Swami Sivananda used to say, and still says through me, "One ounce of practise is better than tons of theory." There is a statement in the *Yoga Sutras* that a practice which is done regularly, for an extended period of time, and with faith, prepares the ground for higher realization. There are three concepts here. Regularity, without a break; for an extended period of time, allowing the practice to purify, harmonize and balance the inner structure of the personality; and faith, the conviction that we will eventually experience the result of the practice.

It is also necessary to separate the mind from the practice. You may ask the meaning of separating the mind from the practice. You have to realize that the mind needs constant stimulation, and if you are repeating something day in and day out, then definitely after some time the mind is going to say, "Enough", and start looking for something new, better and faster. In that way you will be creating a barrier in your receptivity to the practices.

The moment we begin to think about something else the mental tuning is lost. We have to tune in to the practice

in the same way as we tune a radio. Unfortunately, we do not have FM stations, only short wave. FM can only be attained after you have reached sahasrara. However, in the short wave system there are many conflicting radio waves and you have to be very precise in tuning the mind to the frequencies of prana, chakra, kundalini, consciousness, nature, mind, external environment, work and so on. The moment you are properly tuned and there is harmony without extreme conditions in the immediate environment to disturb your peace of mind, the benefit of the practice will be experienced.

Therefore, it is not kriya yoga or kundalini yoga which is important as much as it is your ability to maintain regularity of practice. In the course of time, as you progress, I am sure that you will be able to feel the level of your inner awakening intuitively. Please remember however, that the mind has to be isolated from the practice. It is one commitment which you have to make to yourself.

How can one achieve balance of mind while living in a world full of distractions?

Theoretically, in order to attain balance of mind it is necessary to be aware, relaxed, centred and happy with every situation externally, internally, mentally and emotionally, and to be simple, natural, unassuming, free from pride and from attraction to the opposites of *raga* and *dvesha*, pain and pleasure. Yogis and the scriptures say that one must try to find one's balance by following a discipline which incorporates all these aspects of self-training, which can make one balanced, contented, joyful and at peace with oneself.

On the practical side, it is difficult because there are so many different factors involved. There are so many subtle ideas and expressions that sustain and nurture a human personality that it becomes very difficult to be an observer. One becomes a part of things and loses one's balance, one way or the other, either on the happy or the sad side.

There are four points that can help one attain mental balance. The first is regulating the extremes of the mental projections in the form of thoughts, emotions, desires or ambitions. The second is being observant, not just of oneself but also of the other people around you. In the same way as you are aware of your personal needs, become aware of the personal needs of others. If you can do that, your interactions will be much more harmonious, balanced, creative and constructive. Self-awareness has to extend outwards.

The third is trust in guru. Trust in guru has helped me because it has created a link which has taken away the sense of loneliness and isolation from my life. There comes a time in everybody's life when they feel alone, and not only alone but lonely, not needed or wanted. That has not affected me because of a link, an understanding, a connection with my guru.

The fourth point is surrendering to the Divine Will, not in a religious sense, but as a feeling. Someone has just sung a kirtan with the name Niranjanananda in it. I did not identify with that name because who is that? Is that person this body which is sitting here? Then a sense of pride and ego would come up. Or is it the person who is singing, feeling and thinking about that unblemished, untainted, immaculate nature and bliss, which the name conveys? I did not identify with the person, but with the quality of that name. Then I saw a different dimension to that song, which many of you may not have been able to see, because you are identifying that name with a figure, a person, and not with the idea or concept it conveys.

I don't identify with God, although I know He is there. I think of God at times with full faith and devotion, but the rest of the time I am totally away from that thought. Similarly, why should I identify with this body? I may think about this body when it gets hungry or thirsty or when it needs rest and sleep. Why not? But when the body does not require these things, why think of it unnecessarily? Think of something else that is

creative and positive. Why become self-indulgent? Each one of us is self-indulgent in one way or another.

Therefore, the theory and the practicality of attaining mental balance are two different things altogether. The real trick is in having willpower, determination, conviction, faith and trust in oneself and the ability to forge ahead. These are the qualities necessary for attaining mental balance.

Now that you have held the mirror of truth up to me, showing me that I am a demon, is there a danger that I may return home with a tail and two horns?

Do not worry about it; you will be stopped at customs. No country wants to import a demon into their country, so even if you have two horns and a tail, rest assured that you will be stopped at customs and taken to prison.

I feel that we should all reflect on who we truly are. To recognize ourselves as human beings is a great achievement. There are certain personality traits, good and bad, which are unique in each one of us, and others which are common to all of us. As practitioners of yoga, and followers of a spiritual tradition, it is our duty not to hide behind an idea which is incorrect. I cannot be a good man or woman, because I have negativity, anger, hatred, jealousy and I am biased. I cannot be a bad man or woman, because I have the ability to love, to become passionate, to be generous. I have my unique qualities and strengths.

Do not label anyone, either yourself or others, as a good person or a bad person. Stop labelling and start to recognize your nature as and when it manifests. If I fall into a depression, I should know that I am falling into a depression and try to find the means to overcome it, by my personal effort. If I become jealous of somebody, I should know that I am becoming jealous. I should observe that reaction of jealousy, what I feel, how I feel, why I feel it, and try to channel that negative emotion.

If I feel kind and loving towards people, I should be aware of it and observe my reactions and expectations. I

should know what my conditionings are. In my opinion, a human being is one who can understand situations and respond to them in the appropriate way. A human being is one who strives to be joyful, happy and content, no matter what the external or internal situations may be.

We have to go through this process of personal realization. There is no mirror of truth, only the understanding of human nature, of mentality, personality, behaviour and attitudes, actions and corresponding responses. One who can go through this process of personal realization is a yogi. This is the statement of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Can you please explain the concept behind ashram?

In ancient times, ashrams were places where a seer, a rishi, or spiritual master lived. That was his household. Young people, students, went there to learn skills, both spiritual and social, which would be useful in their later life.

Ashrams were *gurukuls*, or educational institutions guided by enlightened beings who took upon themselves the responsibility of giving the right samskaras and creating the right type of person, without interfering in the social structure, which was under the jurisdiction of kings, emperors and lawmakers.

Fifty years ago, there were no ashrams in society, because the concept of gurukul had changed, along with political and social changes. Enlightened beings, sadhus or sannyasins lived in total isolation, far away from society. Then, spiritual thirst took many people to remote corners where these renunciates lived. They started to live there with them practising sadhana and developing a community around the master.

Now, the yogis did not like this. They began to think, “We have left society, now society is coming to us. What are we to do?” Then some of them said, “Okay we will train a few people, who can then go out into society and establish ashrams.” So the concept of ashram came into being. Ashrams were established in those towns and cities where

there was interest and support for them to survive and grow. This is the concept of ashram which we see today.

I do not consider an ashram to be a spiritual place where everybody walks around with halos over their heads. An ashram is a place where *shram*, or effort and action, are the focus, effort and action for personal development, and development of the community and society. Each ashram should have a focus, though some ashrams may not, depending on how well the tradition or lineage is being maintained. If the tradition is being followed and the lineage maintained, then an ashram will always have a focus. Where there is a strong tradition and lineage, both the educational and spiritual aspects can be maintained.

It is not necessary that only pious and good people go to ashrams. Ashrams are not only meant for pious and good people, but for the rough and tough, so they can change. Ashrams are meant for the crooked, so that can change. There is no use changing good people into good people, but it is worthwhile changing the sick, the crooked and the devious, into good people. Not every person who comes to an ashram is spiritual. We all come with our own natures and samskaras carefully prepared by our parents, and it takes a lot of effort for a person who adopts sannyasa to change. In the thirty years of my life, I have seen very few people with some outstanding quality. The majority have been failures; I am being straight and blunt. Very few people have been able to change themselves, to maintain their positivity and nurture their creative quality, and many have gone astray due to power, control and manipulations.

I always feel that we learn an invaluable lesson in an ashram. What is that lesson? We learn how to develop immunity from influences, situations, people and their mentality, and the games which surround us. At least, I have learned that. I have learned to become immune. Once this lesson of immunity is learned, one can survive anywhere in the world without going through any kind of head-trip, without losing the goal and the vision of a balanced life. It

is for this reason that I cherish and uphold the ideal of an ashram. One cannot learn this lesson anywhere else. There is no opportunity.

In professional life you go to work, you may not like the boss, but you get some relief when you come back home and relax and enjoy yourself. If you do not like your family, you can go to work and relax there. There are always distractions to make it easier for you to adjust. There are conflicts no doubt, but at the same time, there is the possibility of adjustment. You can always have a break and change your mentality for one hour, and that helps. However, in an ashram, even if you dislike somebody, you have to sleep in the same room with them. You have to live with them, so either you dislike the situation and get out, or you learn to adjust. This is a form of training given to the mind, so it can realize what raga and dwesha are. People who live in this environment may not always appreciate it, but once they leave it they begin to notice the validity and importance of the place.

I do not doubt it when people say they do not like the residents of the ashram. There is absolutely no reason to like them, because they all come from different backgrounds with different ideas, aspirations, ego problems and desires, and it is not necessary for all of us to have a uniform mentality. However, if you can remember the purpose for which an ashram is created, and dedicate yourself to the attainment of that purpose, then the ashram will prove to be an invaluable training ground for you. It brings out a different you.

To my understanding, and in my experience, ashrams located in beautiful places serve no purpose. In an ashram, the life has to be an uphill climb. Sri Swamiji has said this very clearly, not once but hundreds of times, in his satsangs, in his lectures, privately, individually, in groups. An ashram is a place of struggle. I remember the first time he went to Australia and they were thinking of having the ashram at Mangrove. He said, "I'm very happy that nothing is here, that the people who want to develop the ashram will have to build it brick by brick, live without water and electricity, have

a common vision and work towards it.” The ashram vision inspires a particular course of action, attitude, determination and will. If we get everything ready-made, what kind of training will we have?

In Rikhia, Sri Swamiji said that we belong to a very fragile society. We break so easily. Somebody frowns at us and we break. Somebody smiles at us and we get bloated. Our whole nature is very fragile. In an ashram environment it is this fragility which one has to overcome. It is a place where you have to strive to ignore the negativity of others. You have to strive to build up your own positivity, to make an effort to adjust and understand raga and dwesha. This is an important stepping-stone to spiritual life.

About being sick in the ashram, I have heard many people say, “Oh, it is a form of karmic release.” I have heard many people say that diarrhoea is a type of karmic release, that dysentery and vomiting are a part of the karmas. People come up with funny ideas. I think it is just adjustment to a new environment: diet, air, water and routine. Once you have adjusted to the environment, you do not become sick any more. This is especially the case with people who come from overseas. They are used to hygienic living conditions, drinking bottled water all the time, living in a clean environment, and because of these extremely hygienic conditions, their personal immunity goes down. I have experienced it myself. When I go to Europe or Australia for a month or so and then return to India, the first thing I do is drink tap water to put the bugs and bacteria back in. Only then do I feel good.

One year ago, a team of Japanese people came to India. They used to walk around with dust masks, dust filters. Whenever they went into town there would be a crowd of people just looking at them. They brought their own food with them, and despite all their precautions, after three days they all had diarrhoea. That made me think very hard, “Why, despite all these precautions, have they become sick?” And suddenly it came to me. We live in a zero bacteria condition,

which reduces our immunity because the immune system has nothing to fight against. When we travel to another place, especially if we have not travelled for a long time, it takes some time to adjust and adapt, and for our natural immunity to become strong.

After returning from my travels in 1983, I became sick all the time and everybody in the ashram used to laugh at me. I had stayed away from India for fourteen years. Previously, I used to come and go and it did not make much difference; when I came back for good and stayed here, without exaggeration, for two to three years I would get sick every month and stay in bed for a week or ten days, because my body was not used to it. Therefore, I believe sickness to be a natural process of adjustment to a new environment, climate, diet, food, water, routine, lifestyle, and not a state of karmic release. It is definitely not a state of karmic purification.

When in the course of one's evolution would maithuna be practised as a sadhana, and how does one learn it?

I do not think you need to learn it. God has taught you already how to practise maithuna. *Maithuna*, or the sexual act, is recognized as the first instinct. Even God was not free from it. It has been stated in the scriptures that, when God felt lonely, he decided from being one he would become many. How did he become many? Through the simple process of maithuna.

Maithuna is not just a physical act, although in our society and culture we consider it to be so. Tantra does not see this as a physical act only, rather it views it as the process of union in all dimensions of the human personality from which a new birth takes place. In order to understand this concept you will have to study tantra or join one of the Bihar Yoga Bharati courses. It will not be possible for me to explain tantra in five or ten minutes.

The act of procreation, the sexual act in its wide form, is recognized as being an inherent instinct along with fear, craving for fulfilment and the desire to shut off the realm of time, space and object. These four instincts are represented

in the four lower chakras. Sexuality is represented in mooladhara. *Bhaya*, fear, is represented in swadhisthana. Craving for fulfilment of human desires is represented in manipura. The desire to shut oneself off from the realm of time, space and object, *nidra*, is represented in anahata.

We think of *nidra* as being ordinary sleep, when in reality it means the absence of sensorial awareness, the absence of the experience of time, space and object. In sleep we get a glimpse of this state. When we are awake and alert we are aware of time, place and objects. In sleep, six or eight hours can go by and we do not know where we are because there is total loss of external sensorial awareness. There is no concept of place until we open our eyes again. There is no concept of object, even of the physical body, and this is a state of death. When Saint John of the Cross stated, "I swear by God I die every night", he was referring to *nidra*.

Similarly, *ahara* which is craving, desiring, motivation for the fulfilment of personal desires, is a force which indicates to us that we have to be a part of life. *Ahara* today has come to mean only food and physical fulfilment, but it includes mental and spiritual fulfilment also. Just as food is required to nourish the body, states of happiness, joy and other pleasant experience are required to nurture our mind. Similarly, the spirit has requirements for it to be full.

Fear expresses itself in different ways in everybody's life, and it is said that the greatest fear is the fear of the unknown. That is a statement of our rational mind, however, the greatest fear is not the fear of the unknown; rather, it is the fear of losing one's individuality. Thus, the process of self-realization is difficult for us to attain because even though we can go right to the edge of the abyss, before we can make the jump, fear comes, "What will happen to me? What will happen to everything that I hold dear in my life?" and we draw back. Therefore, despite all the efforts, not many people become self-realized because only a few, the brave ones, can make the final jump. We may all desire it; however, we do not have the capacity to make the jump.

The same applies to maithuna. It is an inherent desire in each and every individual to feel fulfilled. According to tantra, maithuna has three roles to play. The first is for pleasure, the second is for progeny and the third is for the sublimation of the sexual energy. Pleasure and progeny are the common concepts about sex; sublimation is a difficult concept to swallow. Nevertheless, tantra has emphasized sublimation as being the goal of maithuna, and it describes the different attitudes and disciplines that one needs in order to be able to follow this sadhana. This part of tantric sadhana is not common knowledge. It is not something which is written in a book like *APMB* or *Kriya Yoga*. The knowledge is imparted by word of mouth because there has to be a great degree of self-control. Only a person with a very strong force of will, can perfect tantra, nobody else.

Tantra classifies human beings into three categories. The *pashu bhava* people lead the animal life and include normal masses. *Veera bhava* people are warriors with the highest degree of self-control. Only they can practise and perfect tantra. People with *divya bhava*, divine or transcendental qualities, can impart the teaching of tantra, and nobody else.

We belong to the category of *pashu bhava*, animal tendencies, because we have no control over our emotions, likes and dislikes, mind and senses. What should we do? What we can do is try to change the *pashu*, the animal, into *veera*, the warrior. This change has to take place through yoga, and then tantra can be practised and perfected. Once it is practised and perfected we can move into the third bhava, *divya* or divine. Then we will have the ability to transmit and propagate the subject of tantra. These are the strict guidelines of tantra.

What methods have you found best for acquiring discrimination?

Discrimination is practically impossible, because what do I discriminate against? If I discriminate in favour of or

against something, I am doing it from my perspective, but is my perspective the correct one? My perspective cannot be correct.

One thing I have found helpful, however, is learning how to put myself in the shoes of another person, thinking like them, feeling like them, experiencing pain and pleasure as they would experience it and developing an understanding of the other person's perspective. In this way I can come to a balanced decision which does not affect me or the other person in a negative or restricting way. That balanced decision is the power of discrimination.

We are all very immature when it comes to understanding other people's needs, feelings and emotions because we continuously identify with our own needs, feelings and emotions. It seems like an impossible feat to develop true discrimination; however, one thing I have found helpful is putting myself in the shoes of another person. Try it; it may help you.

Could you comment about the benefits and risks of self-imposed discipline?

The Sanskrit word for discipline is *anushasana*, *anu* meaning subtle or internal and *shasana* meaning to control, govern or direct, to be in command of, to be the master. From a yogic perspective, one who is disciplined means one who has control over the inner expressions of the self, that is, the subtle expressions of the personality. This internal discipline is the important one in yoga.

The first statement of the *Yoga Sutras* is: *Atha yoga anushasanam*. Commentators have interpreted this as meaning, "Now, the discipline of yoga", but the actual definition should be – "Yoga is a method of channelling, controlling or directing one's internal experiences, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual." This idea of discipline has been further defined by Patanjali as, *chitta vritti nirodhah* – "The aim of discipline is to control, modify, direct and channel the fluctuating vrittis of the mind." This is the yogic meaning of discipline.

Some people say that imposed disciplines are also necessary; however, we differ from that concept. We say that imposed philosophies are necessary, not imposed disciplines. What is an imposed discipline? Waking up at four in the morning by setting the alarm every day? That is not discipline; it is just reorganization of the daily routine. Practising yoga every morning for two hours? That is not discipline. You are doing it because you want to do it! If you did not want to do it, you would not even consider practising yoga. Therefore, that also cannot be considered as discipline.

In an ashram or community environment we have to regulate the routine, “Okay, this is the time for this, this is the time for that, this the time for the other.” I do not call that discipline. Imposed discipline means imposing an idea or concept on your life in order to improve it. For example, Saint Francis of Assisi took the vow of poverty. That is self-imposed discipline.

Sri Swamiji has said many times, “Accept the philosophy of suffering. Don’t reject suffering, don’t fight against suffering. Don’t crave the good, the happy and the joyous. Suffering is part of life and happiness is also a part of it. The moment you learn to adjust to suffering you become happy, and if you can’t adjust to the suffering, then you are unhappy.” Therefore, acceptance of this philosophy of suffering is self-imposed discipline which helps you to restructure your mind, rationality, and understanding of life. The normal routine things that we do during the day at specific times are not discipline.

It is the concepts and ideas which we hold on to in order to make us realize our nature and better our life, which form discipline. I would even go to the extent of saying that discipline and discipleship are very close to each other. If you consider yourself to be a disciple, a follower of truth – I am not saying a disciple of a guru or a tradition. I am saying a follower of truth, of a spiritual path – then you need to create long-term changes in your life, and these long-term changes

are parts of discipline. They should also be something with which you are comfortable, something which you can accept. If you are not able to accept a discipline, you cannot follow it and it will not have any meaning for you. If you are able to accept a discipline and follow it, then it has meaning.

Thus, the question of self-imposed discipline, easy or hard, has no meaning. It depends on how much you are able to accept and how much you are able to go forward in pursuance and completion of that discipline.

Would you speak on some of the highlights of your life with Sri Swamiji over the years?

My mind goes blank when I am asked this question. I cannot say anything about this subject because my relationship with him is different. On a physical plane I am his servant, I obey him. On the inner plane he is my mentor, guide and companion. On the spiritual plane, he and I are one. That is my connection and relationship with him.

There have been many, many years of rich experience with Sri Swamiji which I am unable to put into words. Every moment of the time I spend with him is a moment of learning. And this learning is not just intellectual, it is a learning which touches the deepest aspects of my being, and that is something I can never explain.

In the past I have been drawn to Shiva and more recently to you. I have been touched by the compassion of Jesus, the playfulness of Krishna, and the strength of Ganesha which helped me through rough times. Does ishta need to be one, and if so, is there a recipe to discover that one?

Initially, in order to focus our mind, in order to identify with a quality, the ishta has to be one; however, when you are well-established on the spiritual path, different images representing different qualities can be adopted to enable you to live your life in the fullest way possible.

The hero in my life is Sri Swamiji, although I also derive inspiration from the playfulness of Krishna, tranquillity of

Buddha and the righteous life of Rama. Therefore, I work with four ishtas: Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Sri Swamiji. There is nothing wrong with it! Although my goal is one, for me to express my nature optimally and creatively, I need the righteous living of Rama as one ingredient, the joy and playfulness of Krishna as another ingredient and the tranquillity of Buddha as the third ingredient. These qualities make me understand my own personality. By imbibing these qualities in my personality I try to become a better, happier human being. My ideal hero is, of course, Sri Swamiji.

There should be no conflict. Conflict will only arise in the minds of the uninitiated, those who see the difference between one and the other, whose minds are on one track. It is good to have a one-track mind, but in the process of evolution the vision has to broaden. A deeper understanding of the qualities of the deities is the point of focus for developing our own qualities.

Do not make me your ideal or you will suffer. I'm still a beginner, and I still put on different masks which you will have difficulty trying to understand.

Would you speak to us on the importance of the Bihar Yoga Bharati within India and Nepal? What is its role in the present and future culture of the East and West?

The future is unknown. There have been many people in the past who have tried to establish something for the future, but who have not succeeded. We should not worry about the future but try to improve our present situation.

Bihar Yoga Bharati (BYB), for which Sri Swamiji made a lot of effort, is actually the fulfilment of the vision of Swami Sivananda. Sri Swamiji constructed Ganga Darshan, not with the idea of an ashram in mind, but with the idea of eventually developing it into a yoga university. Now, it is our responsibility to make sure it happens.

Yoga is a science. There are many different styles of yoga teaching, and each master has labelled his yoga according to his name. Today we have different styles of yoga, and

this is all right, but we have to look at the total dimension and structure of it. In the future, the need for yoga will be felt by different sections of society. In the twentieth century, we have seen the development and growth of yoga, from yoga for beauty and health, to yoga for the management of different social problems. In the future also, new interest will be generated in the application of yoga in different fields for social, personal and global development.

BYB aims to be the first yoga university, which will try to investigate and carry out research into classical yoga. It will not only propagate one kind of yoga, for example hatha yoga, raja yoga or any other particular yoga. Today, yoga teachers all around the world have taken one aspect of yoga and are concentrating on that, whether it is hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, or bhakti yoga. Different people have labelled yoga according to their own viewpoint and understanding, but this not our intention. The yoga that was taught by Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) was known as Satyananda Yoga, but the yoga which will be taught by BYB, will be known as Bihar Yoga, not Satyananda Yoga.

Most of you have heard of Kashmir Shaivism, one of the traditions of Shaiva tantra, which is supposed to be very pure. Shaivism is the name, Kashmir is the state. Kashmir Shaivism means Shaivism which was developed in Kashmir, representing the purest of the traditions. Similarly, the yoga that will be taught here will be known as Bihar Yoga, because the yoga which is being developed in Bihar represents the pure, classical yoga.

Health, internal realization and psychology are important aspects of a person's life. In order to cater to these three, BYB has three departments at present, which will increase in the future. One department is Yoga Philosophy, another is Yoga Psychology, and the third is Applied Yoga. These are the three areas where we wish to concentrate initially in order to increase our understanding of the yogic process. When I say we, I mean the sannyasins here that are devoted and dedicated to the cause of yoga. Even though we are

sannyasins, we do not know the yogic tradition fully. We know asanas and pranayama because that is what we teach, but what about the other aspects of yoga which need to be brought out from the tradition and presented to humanity?

The swamis will join in the first yoga philosophy course because they will become the future teachers. It is important to know more than how to practise an asana or a pranayama, but to understand what the benefits and limitations are. We must know the foundation of yoga, its philosophy, how it relates to our modern life, culture and society, and also how it relates to the qualities inherent in humanity.

Yoga Psychology is a new field. It is not that we do not know anything about it; we are simply trying to develop it. It is new in relation to the modern context, but ancient in relation to the traditional context. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali is a text book of yoga psychology, which begins with the sutra: *Yogah chitta vritti nirodhah* – “To control the modifications of the mind is yoga.” Understanding the effect and influence of the vrittis in our day-to-day life and managing the vrittis, is the foundation of Yoga Psychology.

Until now, we have thought of yoga on a personal level as being very individualistic, but what are the social and global aspects of yoga? How can yoga help manage the problems of society, without creating conflict, without creating a separation of ideas, thoughts, beliefs, cultures and civilizations? This will be the thrust of Applied Yoga, the management of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Eventually, BYB will become a research centre from which appropriate teachings and techniques will flow out to the lives of the people, and I feel confident and optimistic that with the blessings of the visionaries of Bihar Yoga Bharati, we shall succeed.

What is the relationship between sound and cosmic consciousness?

In the scriptures it is stated that in the beginning there was the word or nada, and that the entire creation is the result

of that first or primal sound. Yogis have given the name *Om* to that sound. *Om* also represents the three attributes or constituents of the higher force, which is known as Shakti, Maya or Prakriti. Whenever two forces come together it results in sound vibration or *taranga*. That subtle vibratory field is known as *nada* on the cosmic dimension.

The original *nada* or primordial sound is considered by the yogis to be the word *Om*. According to them, from *Om*, which contains equal force and potencies of Brahman and Maya, Shiva and Shakti, Purusha and Prakriti, the entire evolution has taken place. From the sound *Om*, worlds have come into being. How all that has evolved, from a simple vibration to the dense form of matter, is a subject of discussion in many philosophies. I am not going to go into those philosophies now; however, the result of whatever metamorphosis took place in the vibratory field of the cosmos, was the entire universe.

The sound *Om* pervades each and every molecule, atom and cell that exists in creation. Scientists today have discovered the vibratory field of the nucleus in our body and they say that man is composed of an energy field, a force, *shakti*, which is continually pulsating and vibrating. If you listen to that vibration your mind and intellect will identify it as having a form which can be recognized and understood. However, vibration which is both subtle and cosmic has either very high or very low frequencies which are inaudible to the human ear. Nevertheless, they exist. Just as the stars influence our attitudes, behaviour and destiny in many ways, these *sukshma taranga* or subtle vibrations, which are inside and around the body, and in the universe, influence and alter the natural biorhythm of the body.

These sound vibrations were identified by the yogis and became known as *mantras* or aksharas. Each *akshara* or syllable is a frequency of sound. They are fifty in number. These fifty aksharas are depicted symbolically in the chakras. The aksharas, which represent sound vibrations of different frequencies, pitch and amplitude, control the activity of the

physical body or *annamaya kosha*, the field of higher intellect or *vijnanamaya kosha*, and the experience of perfection and unity of the atmic body or *anandamaya kosha*.

The mantras in the chakras represent the level of consciousness at a given time in life. They also represent the state of matter, the body, the fixed identity of the mind and the mental nature. Therefore, it has been said that mantras are very powerful tools for altering, not only the subtle vibratory structure and field of a human, but also the body. Many experiments have been conducted which have proven that sound vibrations affect and alter material objects which are insentient in nature.

When we are able to identify a vibration and our logic gives it a form, sound and quality which we can recognize, it is known as a mantra, but when it is beyond the range of human perception it is known simply as taranga, *pravaha*, flow or current. So mantras are used for the development and growth of body, mind and consciousness. They harmonize the hyperactivity of the vibratory field in the body and the mind. Due to this, people often experience complete physical relaxation, concentration and focusing of their creativity whenever they start repeating their mantra. Many people find mental peace when they enter an environment where the currents around them, the *pravaha*, the flow, are in harmony with the currents of their body.

How do we know what level we have reached in relation to the chakras?

There is no question that right now we are all at the level of mooladhara. I have never believed people who say that their anahata, vishuddhi or ajna chakra is awakened. No, I think it is all pure nonsense, because when these higher chakras are awakened your life becomes different, your behaviour, attitude, perceptions, work, thoughts and everything changes.

If somebody who says that their ajna chakra is awakened, is still going through the same suffering of people who are

in mooladhara then how can it be true? It is a pure case of mental fantasy and no awakening has, in fact, taken place. They are only duping themselves. Just as the body changes from a baby body to a young body, an adult body, an old body and a dead body, the mind, consciousness and perception change with the awakening of the chakras. Do not think that you can live in the world when your chakras are awakened. Do not imagine you can live a *grihastha* or household life then. It is not possible; you will be a total misfit, because the chakras represent our spiritual evolution, the evolution of consciousness. The higher we go, the more difficult it becomes to live in the worldly environment. The realization comes, "What is the use of connecting myself with things that are impermanent by nature?" If that *bhava* or feeling comes, that jnana, there is no way one can survive in the world, because it is not the nature of the world to provide you with jnana.

The nature of the world provokes so many questions in you, and you never act upon the answers which you receive. Take one practical example: so many people ask me so many things, "Swamiji, can I do this or that in my life?" I give them the answer and they say, "Oh, I can't do that." Then, why did they ask me in the first place? They were just asking out of curiosity, and unfortunately they never achieve the aim of their life. They are so caught up in comparisons and analysis that the actual experience of transformation does not take place. Therefore, from my perspective and from the yoga perspective, we are all at the level of mooladhara. The yogic perspective has been very clearly defined in the *Yoga Sutras* which say that we are all stuck at one level of existence, and until there is a change in our lifestyle, samskaras and vrittis, nothing can happen. We cannot move one step forward.

You have to change your samskara, your *manovritti*, patterns of mind, the method of your work, and your performance. Until this happens, you cannot progress beyond mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura. In kundalini yoga it is stated very clearly that kundalini can

only go up as far as manipura, and then it has to come back down to mooladhara because the worldly attractions are so strong. Once kundalini crosses manipura there is no return. Then with the ascent of kundalini you have to change and you burn in fire. The old personality, the old attitudes, samskaras and vrittis begin to die. Kundalini is not the simple phenomena that people have made it out to be. Kundalini yoga can only be practised, and the awakening of the chakras achieved, by those who have their senses and mind under control. Otherwise, they will end up as misfits in society or in a mental asylum. That is why we have many cases of kundalini imbalances.

We are all at the level of mooladhara, having our own insecurities, fears, convictions, ideas and concepts. I am not trying to disappoint anybody. I am just trying to let you know the complexity of the process of transformation within human consciousness, within the physical and psychic body. This entire concept has been defined very clearly in the *Yoga Sutras* in relation to samskaras and pratyayas, or *bija*, seeds.

There is no doubt that we all have the ability to reach the highest state of consciousness, and we can attain this through a process in which we disassociate ourselves from the areas of attraction and attachment. We have to control the self-oriented *vasanas*, cravings; and *kamanas*, desires, and channel our actions so that they are liberating and not binding. This is the message of the *Bhagavad Gita* and also of yoga. Once you are able to do this through discipline and awareness, then with the awakening of willpower, *sankalpa shakti*, you can go into states of meditation and purify the energies which guide the physical and psychic body.

A glimpse of the initial awakening of kundalini can be had through the practice of pranayama and prana vidya. A glimpse of the actual focusing begins as the ambitions gradually drop away and you become one-pointed. This is known in the *Yoga Sutras* as: *Eka chitta abhyasa*, and in the *Bhagavad Gita* as *sthira matih*. You can create this change in the vibratory field of the body with the continued

effort of sadhana. As you internalize your perception and consciousness you will notice a change in the vibratory field of the body. This occurs with the awakening of the chakras, by means of the bija mantras.

At the physical level, all the chakras are open and activated up to a point; however, that activation and manifestation of chakra consciousness and activity is happening at a gross level, and not at the psychic, spiritual level. Sometimes we get intuitive flashes but they are in relation to our environment. Sometimes we feel our emotion being channelled in different directions, because anahata is searching for the external manifestation of shakti. Anahata is searching for that kind of attraction, attachment or identification.

One chakra may be open one percent, another chakra may be open three percent, another ten percent and yet another, fifty percent. According to the degree the chakras are opened, our nature is determined. The concept of kundalini yoga however, is to awaken them for inner, not external attainment. Inner attainment in kundalini yoga or nada yoga takes place only when the consciousness is internalized and disassociated from the objects of attraction. This is known in the *Yoga Sutras* as going beyond *kala*, *sthiti* and *desh*, time, space and object.

Can yoga be practised along with physical exercise: a) with weights b) without weights?

I have not tried it and I do not recommend it. The choice is yours, but I would say it is against the principles of yoga to use weights. Why do you want to put a ten kilogram weight on your arms and legs while you are practising surya namaskara or tadasana? The gym is a better place for that, where you can push the dumbbells until your heart's content, but why do you want to force the practice of yoga? The purpose of yoga is to provide *sthiram*, stability, and *sukha*, contentment. The definition of the word asana is: *sthiram sukham asanam*. *Sthiram* relates to the physical body, *sukham*

to the mental experience, and the purpose of asana is to give you both of those. Now, if I am doing surya namaskara or tadasana with a ten kilogram weight on my arms, there will not be sthirata. They will be trembling like a leaf in a storm after about five minutes. My mind will not be in a state of sukha either. I do not recommend this. The purpose of asana is to ease the flow of shakti in the body and mind, not to force the shakti to act in a certain way.

Can prana vidya be practised during, or just after, a course of antibiotics?

There are two schools of thought on this. One which says no, the other which says yes, so it depends on which one you belong to. In order for prana vidya to be effective, and to fulfil the aim for which it is practised, physical purification is necessary. To eliminate the toxins from the body, yogis have emphasized the practice of the *shatkarmas*, purification techniques of hatha yoga.

From the yogic perspective, detoxification of the body is important before undertaking any kind of higher practice, to prepare the body for experiencing the inner awakening of shakti. Since I am a follower of yoga, I belong to the second category which says purification is necessary before attempting higher practices.

What is the best way of introducing my teenage sons to yoga?

How about first introducing yourself to your teenage sons? Introduce yourself as a friend and not as the judge, jury and executioner of your sons or daughters. Once you have introduced yourself as their friend, then you can introduce anything else without any difficulty. Good and bad habits are introduced only because of friends. Parents can never induce either good or bad habits because there is always an age gap, or sometimes they become too deeply involved with their children, and the children rebel against that involvement.

Parents are always seen by little ones as figures of authority who they have to fear and respect. Therefore, if you want yoga to become a natural part of your children's lives and not just an enforced discipline, you have to introduce yourself first as their friend, and then yoga will come later on, naturally. Friendship has lots of strength and energy. It can take you on the right path and also the wrong path. Take the example of two school friends. One is very righteous, pure, simple and innocent, and the other is an experimenter. This experimenter goes to the righteous child and says, "Look, I have a cigarette", or "I have some special white stuff", or "I have some special brown stuff, would you like to experiment with it?" The first one says, "No, really, I don't want to do it." "But, I am telling you, I am your friend, would I ever wish you evil? Just have one puff." Thus, that one puff becomes a life-long habit. This is the result of friendship, on the pretext of experiment. You become a slave of the habit because of friendship. Another form of friendship is "Come on, let's go to satsang, we can do that other thing tomorrow", where one friend is slowly moulding the other in the path of *dharma*, virtue and righteousness. Where there is virtue and righteousness, the awareness becomes very sharp and focused and you will be uplifted. Therefore, first be a friend to your child and then yoga will introduce itself naturally.

Could you please explain the concept of having a spiritual name and how this, along with the personal mantra and symbol, can influence and help the student or disciple of yoga? What are the benefits of your giving a specific sadhana or practice to the disciple, and how is this more beneficial than one's own chosen practice?

The body is recognized by a name, Tom, Dick or Harry, but nobody knows the real meaning of their name. The name is just a label and we tend to identify it with our physical body which is constantly changing, rather than with our spirit, which is eternal. Having a spiritual name implies that you

identify a quality of your inner nature or spirit and make that your goal, aspiration and aim.

Names definitely have a very big effect on one's life. Suppose somebody is given the spiritual name *Aham Shuddhi*. *Aham* means ego, *shuddhi* means purification, so the name means purity of the ego, or purity of one's self-identity. The more the person hears their name, *Aham Shuddhi*, the more they will identify with what it conveys. A change will begin to take place within them which will bring out the best in them. It creates an inner transformation, because it touches the deepest aspect of their personality or nature, and the change begins from there.

The mantra is something else; it works at the level of mind: *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. It evokes certain responses in the mind enabling it to identify with the *sattwic* rather than the materialistic, sensual nature. In other words, it enables us to understand the difference between knowledge and wisdom. A mantra is a vibration, having a certain frequency or pitch, a particular rhythm and length. The mind is made up of similar contents. Mind is vibration and frequency. The *gunas* in the mind are its different frequencies and qualities or nature. The mantra works at this level by harmonizing, restructuring and balancing the agitations that are the natural expressions of the mind.

When an individual repeats one's personal mantra initially, one experiences some form of inner peace, contentment, satisfaction, source of strength and security. One gains more command of one's abilities, performances, thoughts and also awareness.

The psychic symbol is the focus for channelling the energies of the mantra in order to create a corresponding change in the psychic body, which is governed by images, symbols, *yantras* and *mandalas*. Each symbol, image, *yantra* or *mandala* used as a psychic symbol conveys, in the language understood by the consciousness, an idea of harmony, equilibrium, balance, stability, strength, power

and wisdom. In fact, all the qualities which are necessary to convert a person into a superperson. This is the purpose of the symbol, to convey an idea to the consciousness in a language which is understood by consciousness.

Mantra and psychic symbol are very powerful tools through which to create a positive and creative transformation within the personality and within the consciousness, so that one can live more happily and joyfully with greater participation in the world. For the majority of people only these three things are necessary. Sannyasa becomes necessary for those few people who want to pursue their aspiration more vigorously and deeply. Those people take jignasu, karma or poorna sannyasa and try to live that name as best as they can.

Regarding a specific sadhana, a sadhana should be given by the guru to the disciple only if there is a link between the two. That link or feeling will not exist in a person who is not a disciple. Students cannot have it, friends cannot have it, and guides cannot have it. Only those who have identified with the guru can have that link.

One cannot see one's own face. In order to see your face you need a mirror. The guru acts as that mirror, and when you look into that, you have to become aware of yourself and how you look. How can we become aware of where to look and how to look? Through a sadhana prescribed by the guru, who knows you intuitively and who can identify with the positive aspects in you and help you overcome the shortcomings by not sparing the rod. The guru's role is not complete if he or she only tells you about the good things within you. A guru also has to be able to tell you objectively what your faults are, and one should not mind having those faults pointed out. By observing the disciple, the correct sadhana can be given.

We are not self-observers. We believe what we want to believe due to our ego, and are often intolerant of other people's beliefs. If one has the ability to be the witness, the seer, the *drashta*, then one can formulate one's own

sadhana; however, we do not have this ability because we are too caught up in our own feelings, emotions and ego. Therefore, we feel that what we believe is right, and if somebody tries to enforce a different idea on us we consider it to be a type of brainwashing. If we are crooked, then somewhere there is an imbalance or fault and that fault has to be identified and rectified. Thus it is actually the relationship between guru and disciple which is important, not the sadhana.

Sadhana comes naturally and the more you develop an understanding of yourself, the simpler your sadhana becomes, I can assure you of that much. People think exactly the opposite. They believe that the more they do the better they will be, “Instead of one hour I’ll do eight. I’ll become a saint in a few days”, but it does not happen that way. Initially, you need to do a lot of sadhana so your body gets adjusted, for it has to adapt itself to a new lifestyle, a new condition. After that, as the physical needs become less, the hours and number of practices decrease and the type of sadhana changes.

However, one cannot be one’s own judge. We can only go up to a point with yoga which is very far, and that is the aim of 99.9 percent of the population, but possibly only 0.1 percent wishes to pursue the spiritual path of sadhana in its correct methodology. For them the lifestyle has to be different, the environment has to change, and many other changes have to occur so the sadhana is always guided.

Is the order of sannyasa into which I have been initiated poorna, Dashnami, Saraswati or what? Is this the path of the yogic tradition?

To the first part of the question you are all that you have mentioned, you are a poorna, a Saraswati, a Dashnami and a sannyasin, four things!

The sannyasa tradition and the yogic tradition are two different things. The yogic tradition is that of sadhana whereas the sannyasa tradition is that of lifestyle, and they

are compatible with each other. In fact, they help, support, nurture and sustain each other, although they have the capacity to exist independently of each other as well. It is not necessary for sannyasins to be yogis or for yogis to be sannyasins. They complement one another, yet can be practised separately, according to one's choice and need.

The sannyasa tradition, in brief, is a tradition of *tyagis* or renunciates. There are two clear aspects of sannyasa, the traditional and the modern. Traditional sannyasa is something which is followed more by Westerners. Sannyasa is adaptable. You can be a traditionalist and you can also be a modernist, as long as the aim and goal of sannyasa remains clear to you, and you are able to apply it in your day-to-day life. In order to facilitate this application, different levels of sannyasa initiation came about. In the Satyananda tradition, there are four levels of sannyasa: jignasu sannyasa, karma sannyasa, poorna sannyasa and rishi sannyasa.

The order of sannyasa to which we belong is the Dashnami order which is the union of ten different schools of sannyasa. Just as you have the United States of America and the European Economic Community, EEC, in the same way the Dashnami order is a spiritual community of sannyasins. Ten different sannyasa communities came together under the leadership of Adi Guru Shankaracharya who was born in the sixth century and who formed the Dashnami order. Prior to him, sannyasa existed but not as a united force, not as a community. The sannyasins had been free to follow their own individual will. Saraswati is the name of one of the schools of the Dashnami *paramapara* or tradition, so the Satyananda sannyasins are all Saraswati, whether they are poorna, karma, jignasu or rishi. For easier identification only the poorna and rishi sannyasins use the title of Saraswati; karma and jignasu sannyasins do not use it.

I do not feel a strong devotional link with any guru, however, inspiration and motivation has come to me

through a devoted disciple of Sri Swamiji. Would it be improper for me to receive initiation?

Inspiration can come from anywhere in any form, and it is this inspiration which touches our lives from time to time, either as sannyasins, karma sannyasins, jignasu sannyasins, householders, students or professional people. That inspiration becomes the focus for us to begin a journey, whether it is the yogic journey, the sannyasa journey, or any other kind of journey not necessarily related to yoga or sannyasa. I would suggest that you remember the inspiration which was the motivating factor, and join the bandwagon.

Let me give you an example. Electricity is energy. It flows through the wire and when it reaches the bulb, the bulb lights up whether it is zero watts, a hundred watts or a thousand watts. When this electricity reaches a fan, the fan rotates, when it reaches an oven, the oven heats up. The energy is the same, but in each object it manifests differently. According to our nature we may be inspired by the manifestation of energy in a cooker, fan or bulb, because each manifestation of energy has a role to play. The decision is up to you.

What is brahmacharya and what is brahmacharya ashram? What is the code of conduct for students according to the gurukul system of learning? How much of it is applicable to students of the present age?

One day Sri Swamiji mentioned that there are nine disciplines involved in the code of conduct for a student, except that I would not call them students, I would call them disciples. There is a difference between studentship and discipleship. One can be a student of many things but that association with learning is just temporary. When you go to school you have to study history, biology, chemistry, mathematics, etc. Those subjects only become real for you when you adopt a path related to that particular subject. History will have a meaning for you if you want to become a historian. Biology will have a meaning for you if you want to become a doctor.

Before selecting the subject which means something to you, you have to study many other things which are very rarely applied in life. Following an idea through and excelling in it is discipleship. Studentship on the other hand, is about knowing things but not necessarily applying them. The external learning of how to set up in the world, what skills one needs, can be acquired through studentship. However, something which becomes part of your life, which transforms and touches your life, is part of discipleship. The gurukul system emphasizes the discipline of discipleship, where one lives the subject fully and makes it part of one's experiences. One lives the depth and beauty of it.

Gurukuls emphasize nine disciplines which become part of a code of conduct. The first is being free from delusion and the desire for status and power. One should just try to be mentally free, without having any high expectations. The second is being free from pride, arrogance and the false feeling of security. The third is *ahimsa*, or absence of every kind of violence from the personality. The fourth is forgiveness, *kshama*. One encounters many adverse situations, but they should not always be taken to heart. One should be able to adjust and adapt. Along with adjustment and adaptation comes the natural ability to be the witness or *sakshi*. The fifth is simplicity of speech and thought.

The sixth is respect for the guru. Just as we classify learners into students and disciples, there are two forms of guru. One is *shikshak* or teacher, and the other is guru in the sense of illuminator. There is a big difference between the two. You can ask a teacher, "How do I make a reservation at Munger railway station to catch my train?" The teacher will draw you a map and say, "This is the map of how you can get to Munger railway station. Simply follow the lines." The guru however, will say, "Come on, I'll take you. I'll show you the path." The guru will take a torch, accompany you to Munger railway station, make sure you are on the train safely, and come back and sleep happily.

When you join a gurukul you are part of the family of the guru. You are not in a congregation of teachers who teach different skills, but part of the environment, the lifestyle, the home of the guru. It is in the guru's home that you imbibe the learning which becomes part of your nature and gradually transforms you. The word which has been used to describe this is vipassana. *Vipassana* literally means, 'to be in close proximity of'. One lives in close proximity of the acharya or guru and serves him or her with devotion and faith.

The seventh discipline is purity or cleanliness of body and mind, which includes purity of the environment.

The eighth is stillness or stability of mind. The mind should not be like a monkey jumping from one thing to another, deciding one thing and then the other, every passing moment. You have to become stable, not demanding or dependent, not trying to become the ruler or the ruled, but maintaining your balance and attaining harmony of mind.

The ninth is control of the senses, from the physical, mental and emotional perspective. Without this control there is no discipleship; we may as well pass the time and get out. This is one of the aspects of brahmacharya. Brahmacharya can mean many things. It can mean being established in knowledge of the supreme consciousness. It can also mean sensorial, sensual and sexual abstinence. It can mean leading a disciplined life where we are trying to develop our mind to its fullest potential. *Brahmacharya* in its broadest sense means one who follows a certain path for the evolution of consciousness. One comes to understand the evolution of consciousness and to live according to the need of the present.

In the olden days the rishis divided a person's life into four different stages. The first stage was that of brahmacharya, the disciplined life of the student. In this stage the student followed a code of conduct, living with the guru until the studies were complete, and then going back into society to fulfil the mandates of society and family. The second stage was *grihasta*, household life, being part of the family unit, looking after the family, working, maintaining

and educating the family members, and generally standing on one's own two feet. After that one retired from this deep social involvement and entered the contemplative life which was known as the *vanaprastha* stage. Here one contributed to the development and upliftment of society through one's wisdom and understanding, leading a socially secluded life, but one which was very dynamic intellectually and emotionally. In the course of time, with maturity one adopted the path of sannyasa.

One adopts the path of sannyasa for many different reasons, most of them being quite selfish. Even the concept of attaining enlightenment is selfish. The Buddha said, "In order to become enlightened you have to leave aside even the desire to become enlightened." All the saints have said that, as you go deeper into spiritual life, one of the indications or milestones of your progress is the lessening of desires.

Through karma one accumulates karma, and through karma one overcomes karma. In each case the awareness and application of knowledge, understanding, intellect and emotion is different. You can increase your sensorial, sensual and sexual desires by identifying with them and feeling that you need them in order to get pleasure from life, but this can get out of hand. Through discipline it is possible to control and guide the sensorial, sensual and, in the course of time, even the sexual desire. Therefore, one should try to control, direct and guide, rather than accumulate a greater and unnecessary burden of karma. A lessening of this burden takes place in the sannyasa ashram.

The more deeply we try to become aware, responsible and dharmic, the more we seem to become critical, intolerant and arrogant towards each other. Is there a better way?

No, I do not think there is a better way. This kind of balancing happens in everybody's life. Many times people experience this syndrome. Becoming good and doing good gives rise to other mental states, like becoming intolerant

and critical. Our nature is predominantly tamasic, then rajasic and finally sattwic. Look at it like a tree: sattwa is the root, the spirit, rajas is the trunk and branches, and tamas is the leaves, flowers and fruit.

The first aspect of our nature is tamas. When we eat the fruit of tamas, smell the flowers of tamas, and see the greenness of the leaves of tamas, we become conditioned to see things from one perspective, whatever that may be. That perspective is the outcome of *jnana*, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Thus, even in tamas there is wisdom, understanding and knowledge, but it is influenced by two things: *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction and repulsion, positive and negative, good and bad. The whole thing actually depends on your perspective and understanding of the situation.

You may be good but the goodness affects your ego-body in a different way, by stimulating another type of experience, say that of criticism. You have to overcome this tamasic state in which there are the experiences of *raga* and *dwesha*, pain and pleasure, attraction and repulsion, moon and sun. The time to come out of its influence also comes, just as every autumn, all the leaves fall. Similarly, there are moments when we become very detached from the experiences of the world, and we look for something new to satisfy ourselves. At that time some leaves drop off and some new leaves come. This is our main nature.

The second aspect of our nature is rajas, the ability to control ourselves, to interact harmoniously with situations and conditions, to have a sense of control over our life. In the rajasic state, the main components are our desires, needs, strengths and weakness. Even this can be transcended and you can come to the state of sattwa, the third aspect of our nature.

When the sattwa experience occurs, it takes time to germinate properly. There is a very big gap between the thought of a sattwa experience and the implementation of the sattwa action. It takes time for sattwa to make its way

up from the roots. On one side there is the growth of sattwa and on the other side you are identifying with your basic predominant nature, that of tamas. While sattwa is growing, you are aware of the sattwa nature and you are aware of the need to be more tranquil, peaceful, quiet, happy and contented.

There is an Indian proverb which I like to remind myself of from time to time, “Even in a beautiful flower garden a fly always seeks out human waste. Even in the most barren of deserts, a bee seeks out the tiniest of flowers.” Decide if you are a fly or a bee. If you are a fly, even in the most beautiful garden you will always seek out the waste and if you are a bee, even in the middle of the desert with nothing there except sand, you will seek out the tiniest of the most precious little flowers, and take honey from it.

The *Guru Gita* refers to honouring the guru’s feet. Does this mean your feet or should I just focus on the feet in my heart? Are these Krishna’s feet or yours, or both?

Do not take it literally. Guru here means the energy which guides you in the process of transformation and it is something which is very close to you, very much a part of your being. To that inner Self, you offer your faith, conviction and understanding, and this offering is known as trust and surrender.

Surrendering here means right understanding and becoming one with the guru, just as a drop of rain loses its identity when it falls into the ocean. That ‘being one with’ is the concept of surrendering oneself to the guru. In order for the rational mind to channel its energies away from mundane affairs and bring about a creative transformation, the symbol or image of the feet of the guru or ishta devata has been used.

Feet are the support of the body. Without feet it would be very difficult to stand up, would it not? Can you stand up on your two hands? Feet represent the earth in which the seed grows and develops into a beautiful, vibrant tree.

The feet symbolize the concept of *prithvi tattwa*, the earth element in which the seed of the guru's grace is planted and grows. It is also a process of meditation in which you identify with your innermost nature of simplicity, sincerity and innocence.

In the jignasu code of conduct it is said to practise Gayatri mantra. Please explain this and the importance of bhajans as a daily sadhana.

Scientifically, the sound vibrations of Gayatri mantra stimulate the learning centres of the brain, thereby enhancing memory, retention power, grasping ability, mental alertness and mental awareness. These things are important for the aspirant who wants to progress in spiritual life. When you begin the process of educating yourself in the lifestyle of jignasu sannyasa, the chanting of Gayatri mantra helps you to open your mind and nature, making you more creative, receptive, positive and stable. For this reason Gayatri mantra has been prescribed as an essential practice for jignasu sannyasins.

Regarding bhajans and chanting, singing is an art and the origin of all arts. Before a person can speak he can hum, and humming in different pitches is music. Music is the expression of the spirit and heart, while speech is an expression of the mind.

Music is an integral part of life, and different types of music are appropriate for different lifestyles. When we are carefree students, we enjoy a certain kind of music. When we are responsible family members with kids to look after and a business to manage, our likes and choices change. Similarly, if you put jazz on full blast in an ashram environment, it would sound very strange, quite nice, definitely, but alien to the environment. Similarly, in each environment we express a different *bhava* or sentiment, and these sentiments are expressed in Indian music in the form of raga and ragini. Bhajans are in many styles, simple and plain or very complex and difficult. This expression of the heart is something we have forgotten.

In the early days of the Bihar School of Yoga, somewhere between 1968 and 1970, when we were just about a dozen people, Sri Swamiji made a game for us. If we had to communicate anything, we had to sing it. For three months we sang what we had to speak. Even things like “Lunch is ready”, or “I am going to work”, was sung, and the change, the difference we used to feel! Life was not serious any more; everything became so bright and happy!

According to Patanjali, *Om* sadhana is done with concentration on the meaning of the mantra *Om*. Please explain.

When we chant *Om* at the end of Shanti Path or the beginning of a yoga class, with a long ‘Ooooo’ and short ‘Mmm’, the inner frequency stimulated by the chanting helps to pacify the hyperactivity of the mind and body systems. Short, explosive *Oms*, on the other hand are used to awaken prana shakti, as in kriya and kundalini yoga. The method of chanting *Om* depends on the type of sadhana and practice being undertaken. Do not be confused about what kind of chanting you should do. Just follow the method being taught in any particular branch of yoga, and you will develop a better understanding.

In order for the mantra to penetrate into the psyche, you do not have to think of the superficial meaning, because mantras do not actually mean anything. People began to associate mantras with symbols, images, deities or concepts; however, the original form of any mantra is pure vibration.

We live in a world which is made up of vibrations. Our molecules, our atomic structure, our physical body, even our thoughts are nothing but vibrations, and we have the ability to pick up on those vibrations and identify with them. If you are feeling happy, your whole being will emit a sense of happiness. How? The vibration changes the frequency of the physical and mental energies. If you are feeling depressed, that particular vibration will change the physical and mental frequencies accordingly, so the body will also feel depressed.

It is through vibration that we are linked. We have linked the body with the mind and the mind with the spirit.

Apart from vibrations, another important aspect of life is rationality or *buddhi*, intellect, the ability to understand, to grasp the nature of things. But the expressions of the intellect are superficial, and it is very difficult for a superficial understanding to become an experience. We know that certain thoughts are considered to be 'bad' and that we should not think them, yet we do think them, and get affected by them. We also understand that there are good, creative, positive and constructive thoughts, which can make us more optimistic, energetic and dynamic, and allow us to see the world in a brighter perspective, yet we do not think those thoughts.

We are caught up in the play of vibration and rationality, which is known as feeling and thinking, and our whole life is spent just moving from one to another, thinking and feeling, thinking and feeling, which is like skimming the surface of the ocean and thinking that we have plunged into the depth. Feeling and thinking have been identified in the *Yoga Sutras* as *vrittis* of the mind, and this is the beginning of yoga according to Patanjali.

Mantras work at deeper regions of the mind, not just at the level of feeling and thinking, but at the level of actual vibration. A mantra creates a pattern and everything has a pattern including our thoughts. Alphabets are patterns which are identified by the intellect as A, B, C, D, E, F and G. Those patterns are recognized in the form of words, sentences, phrases and speech. These are external verbal patterns. There are also internal patterns and they all have a shape or image. Our expressions range from feeling, thinking and recognizing external patterns, to something which is more subtle, which is in the form of vibrations or energy movements. Mantras work at these levels.

As I have mentioned, mantras came to be identified with an idea, belief, deity or natural object, which represents the intellectual expression of an experience which is more

subtle, but which does not really convey the true nature of the mantras. For example, take the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya*. If you translate this mantra literally, it means 'I bow down to Shiva'. For that matter, I might even say, "Om Namah Fatheraya, I bow down to my father", or "Om Namah Motheraya, I bow down to my mother", or "Om Namah sisteraya, I bow down to my sister." I bow down to Shiva is not the real meaning of *Om Namah Shivaya*. Each sound whether *Om*, *na*, *ma*, *shi*, *va* or *ya*, is associated with different energy currents in the body, which respond to a certain frequency and pitch.

In yoga these mantras are related with the chakras. *Om* is the bija mantra of ajna chakra and helps us develop our intuitive, spontaneous and creative nature. That is why most of the mantras include *Om*. Similarly, the sounds *na*, *ma*, *shi*, *va* and *ya* all correspond to a particular chakra. They stimulate and awaken different points in the chakra. Therefore the experience of repeating *Om Namah Shivaya* has no association whatsoever with "I bow down to Shiva." If you start thinking about the meaning, "I bow down to Shiva", your first thought will be, "Who is Shiva and why do I have to bow down to him? We live in an age of equality!" These kinds of funny thoughts may come, and then the whole purpose of the mantra will be defeated. Therefore, it is said not to intellectualize the mantra because intellectualization will never give the true picture.

Many people have attempted to describe the meaning of *Om*, considering it to be the primordial sound. It has been talked about a lot in the vedic, upanishadic and tantric traditions. The actual pronunciation of *Om* is A-U-M, not O-M. *Om* comes due to a grammatical rule in Sanskrit which says that when you combine the vibrations of 'A' and 'U' they become 'O'.

The idea behind *Aum* as containing the three syllables A, U, M, is that there is a connection or link between the individual and God. How you perceive God is your business and whether you believe or disbelieve in God is

in accordance with your mentality. God is your business; however, the seers and thinkers have said that there is a link between the individual and the cosmos, between body and soul, and between our subtle aspect, the spirit, and the transcendental aspect, which may be the cause of why we are here. God is considered as having three major aspects which can be found in the word 'God' itself: 'G', standing for generation; 'O', for organization; and 'D', for destruction or transformation.

Yogis have said that in each body there are three knots or *granthis*, which have to be transcended through sadhana in order for the aspirant to experience his higher nature. *Brahma granthi* controls the region of mooladhara and swadhisthana, generation and procreation, which responds to the vibration of 'A'. *Vishnu granthi* is the knot or zone which sustains and nourishes the personality. In this area we have manipura chakra, digestion and physical nourishment, and anahata chakra, emotion and subtle nourishment. *Rudra granthi*, the knot of Shiva, controls vishuddhi and ajna. The seventh chakra is sahasrara where there is vision of Shiva with Shakti, consciousness with energy.

Each of the granthis, or nodes, responds to one of the sound vibrations of *Aum* which are known as *Ishwara*, the unchanging, eternal principal. Ishwara does not mean God, but the potential which has the three faculties of generation, organization and destruction; we on the other hand are *nashwara*, the changing, decaying nature.

When Patanjali told us to reflect on the meaning of *Om* he referred to the specific mantra *Om*, not to any other mantra. He did not say, "Understand the meaning of every mantra", because the sound of *Om* contains within it the potential to transcend the chakras, and the three areas of experience.

When you say, "Aaaaa . . .", and you really let it out, you will see that there is an automatic, natural contraction in the lower part of the abdomen. When you say, "Ooooo . . .", and you really let it out, there will be a natural constriction or

contraction in the chest area. When you say, “Mmmm . . .” then you can feel it vibrating in your head. This is just an example.

This has nothing to do with religion; it is related more to personality. It cannot be measured or quantified; it is a concept which explains the evolution of human personality. It is that which you have to understand. Through your own practice, you have to develop your own thoughts and ideas and this is what Patanjali means when he tells us to reflect on the meaning of *Om*.

Can one who does not believe in supernatural power, be a yogi and attain samadhi and liberation?

I think you will make a better yogi if you do not believe in supernatural powers or have any expectations from them. A person who can do that is a real yogi. A person who gets attracted to the supernatural will only increase his bondage. Therefore, yogis have always said that in order to judge your progress and attainment, observe your desires and your involvement with your desires and you will know.

You are progressing when the quantity of your desires becomes less and their quality becomes universal. Therefore, yoga has always emphasized, and Patanjali has warned in the *Yoga Sutras*, that *siddhis* or supernatural powers come and are experienced, but we should not dwell upon them because they are just a temporary experience on the journey.

One of the basic requirements of a true yogi is to have faith in the sadhana and not in the attainments of the sadhana. You just have to do your sadhana as a part of your life. It should be a natural process just like sleep. Do you have to remind yourself that you have to sleep? No, it is a natural process just like waking up. Similarly, yoga sadhana has to become a natural part of your life. You do not have to think twice about eating; you just leave everything you are doing and go to have your meal. Apply the same principle to sadhana. That kind of regularity, that kind of natural lifestyle will make you a better yogi.

How is it possible to combine ashram living and academic training?

In India, the sciences were developed in an ashram environment. Previously academic teaching was combined with lifestyle training and was known as *gurukul*. Gurukuls were like schools, colleges and universities. Somewhere down the line a split took place due to changes in social values and aspirations, and academic learning became separated from training in lifestyle. Lifestyle training continued to take place in the ashram environment, and academic training went into the hands of the state. Now, the Department of Education, which exists in every country, controls academic teaching.

Today's academic teaching is oriented towards skills, finance and jobs, and there is total neglect in respect to a spiritually balanced lifestyle. In the absence of this training we are losing control over our minds. Mentally, emotionally and intellectually we have become very weak and are easily influenced by the tamasic and rajasic qualities. Although we may appreciate the sattvic quality, we are more influenced by the rajasic one.

Ashram living combined with academic learning is a good integration of practical techniques and theoretical understanding which can help improve everyone's life. This improvement can take the form of an aim, which in philosophical language is known as *mosksha*: freedom from attraction and repulsion, no craving for pleasure, no rejection of pain, finding a point of balance. When we find the point of balance, then our nature changes. We become more creative, receptive and meditative, and intellectual knowledge is converted into applied knowledge, which gives us realization of the Self.

An ashram and a university structure combined create a gurukul. One of the principles, or the underlying support of the gurukul, is building up the process of observation. All the philosophical treatises as we know them today, Samkhya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, yoga, and more, are the outcome of observations conducted in the different gurukuls. The Upanishads are the textbooks of the ancient gurukuls.

The Tantras are textbooks of different Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava gurukuls. These institutions were established by different prominent personalities who were known as rishis, seers and sages.

The entire Samkhya system is the product of the observation of human nature. We can even say that this research was conducted in a gurukul under the guidance of the founder or chancellor of the gurukul called Sage Kapila. Not only philosophical, but even sensual arts were taught as subjects in different gurukuls. Vatsyayana was a sannyasin, a sage, a rishi, and he wrote his thesis on the *Kama Sutra*. The whole world is reading that book, even today; it has not gone out of print. The *Artha Shastras* which are treatises on economics were written by Sage Kantilya. Just as the prefix 'Dr' indicates a PhD today, in those days 'Rishi' was the prefix. Now, the terms Professor, Reader and Lecturer are used in the same way as Rishi was used in the past. The rishis were propounders and teachers of social, moral and spiritual subjects.

Sixty-four different subjects, known as the sixty-four arts, were taught in gurukuls. You could even learn stealing from the shastras of a gurukul. Theft was taught because it was also considered to be an art. Not everyone was taught how to be a thief. The police, in particular, were taught so that they could anticipate what a thief would do. When they retired from the police force they could become thieves! Both options were open to them.

Life is not just a process of gathering money, name, fame, status, family, home, property and children. There is a definite purpose to life and our external life has to be balanced with our internal life and some spiritual thoughts. For this purpose the ashram gurukul system combines the academic and ashram systems.

Could the behaviour problems in children be due to a higher state of consciousness with which they cannot cope?

I do not think this is the only reason. There is a scale of plus, minus, and balance or zero. On the scale, plus represents

evolution, minus represents involution. On the minus side of the scale, we have regression, mental retardation, not being able to cope with situations because we are lagging behind. On the plus side we have hyperactivity, hyperconscious awareness, or a high conscious awareness. Due to this state, children live in a different reality, with a different understanding. They cannot understand the people around them. They do not have the concept of normal; it is either higher or lower.

Each one of us is, to a varying degree, either on the plus or the minus side; no one is exactly in the centre. If you observe yourself objectively and critically, you will find there is a tendency to be either attracted to the positive or the negative side; and only you can know to which side you are inclined. According to that inclination, each one of us acts, thinks, behaves and desires different things at different times, so our performance, attitudes, and everything changes. Those who are inclined too much to one side are labelled 'abnormal'.

I think we have not only to observe the behavioural pattern of a child, but also what kind of inclination they have in their normal life, and then try to find a solution. If they are on the minus side, then we can do this by encouraging them, using different means and methods, caring for them and trying to raise their mental awareness to a normal or higher level. We should try to understand them and make them compatible with the environment around them. I am not saying we should change them, I am only saying that we should make them compatible, not to suppress their ingenuity by the use of harsh treatment.

To my understanding, the most appropriate and beneficial way would be to encourage and support their normal activity so that they can at least have recognition of themselves, and be able to face situations with faith in themselves, so that eventually they can be proud of themselves. A lot of work has to be done in this area. Maybe one day the opportunity will present itself.

What is the proper way to practise kriya yoga as a sadhana? In *Kundalini Tantra*, published by Yoga Publications Trust, a short form and a complete form are described. When should each form be done? Why is tattwa shuddhi taught with kriya yoga? Will doing all the practices of kriya yoga and tattwa shuddhi really awaken kundalini?

The yogis envisioned five dimensions of human experience known as the five *koshas* or sheaths: *annamaya kosha*, the dimension of matter; *pranamaya kosha*, the dimension of energy or prana shakti; *manomaya kosha*, the dimension of subtle experiences, the mind in its totality; *vijnanamaya kosha*, the dimension of the supermind; and *anandamaya kosha*, the transcendental dimension. They are all contained within us, just as butter, yoghurt and cheese are contained within milk.

The process of human development is recognized by the awakening of these five dimensions of experience. From the yogic perspective the physical body is controlled and guided by the senses or *karmendriyas*. The pranic body is the dimension of energy which manifests physically, and also in form of prana shakti at the subtle and causal levels. Prana shakti is responsible for life, motion, and the mental processes. The totality of human experience is guided by the force of prana.

Manomaya kosha is the dimension of mental, subtle experience, in which the gunas: tamas, rajas, and sattwa, play a very prominent role. The gunas manifest in the external dimension as the personality.

Vijnanamaya kosha is the dimension of the higher mind, beyond the four divisions of mind: manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. *Manas* is the faculty of reflection and analysis, *buddhi* is the faculty of rationality and understanding, *chitta* is the faculty of retaining information, and *ahamkara* is the faculty of ego or self-identity. This forms the gross mind. Beyond this is the transcendental mind which is expressed externally in the form of intuitive perception and visions, understanding of the present,

past and future, and expansion of consciousness. The ego identity or self-identity, ahamkara, represents our individuality. Beyond it is vijñanamaya kosha, and beyond vijñanamaya kosha is anandamaya kosha, the dimension where one experiences bliss, joy, happiness, fulfilment, satisfaction and union with the higher Self.

The yoga practices, whether asana, pranayama, pratyahara or dharana, aim at taking the practitioner from the experience of one dimension to another, while harmonizing, balancing and realigning the experiences of these five dimensions. Each of the practices, however, concentrates more on one specific dimension. Asanas focus more on annamaya kosha. Pranayama, bandhas and other techniques of pranic awakening focus on pranamaya kosha. Pratyahara focuses on manomaya kosha. Dharana focuses on the deeper aspects of manomaya kosha, and dhyana focuses on vijñanamaya kosha. The attainment of samadhi, which leads to the experience of anandamaya, is also a vijñanamaya technique.

The yogis created a group of practices taken from different yogas, and these were later recognized as kriya yoga. It is an advanced yoga, not everybody is qualified to practise it, and even if unqualified people begin practising, they will not get very far, because the entire yogic system and theory is based on purification of the self before any kind of attainment can be realized. You have to empty the pot before you can put new things in. Purification is of utmost importance in yoga, and if purification is not attained first then no matter how much you practise kriya yoga, it is not going to make any dent in the armour of your individuality and personality. Therefore, the preparation for kriya yoga is a lengthy one.

Many people think that kriya yoga is a shortcut to kundalini awakening and realization, but it is not true. We have created the label of shortcut to suit our mentality; however, all the evidence of history proves that there are no shortcuts in spiritual life. If there were shortcuts, then more and more people would be at a higher level. Therefore, it

is important for us to understand the necessity of physical and mental purification. Physical purification is obtained through the practices of hatha yoga. Mental purification is obtained through the practices of raja yoga, along with related experiences like development of awareness, and a sensitive, discriminative and balanced nature. The impurities which create blocks in the expression of our natural creativity have to be removed.

Only after the body and mind have been purified by the practices of yoga, do we begin to work with the purification of the physical elements or the *tattwas*, through the practice and theory of *tattwa shuddhi*. Here different methods are adopted to attain purification: mantras, willpower and visualization. Identification with some idea is used to provide a focus for the manifestations of our personality. These manifestations must be harmonized, balanced, regulated and channelled. For this purpose, *tattwa shuddhi* has been added to the practice of *kriya yoga* as a necessary prerequisite.

There are twenty major or important *kriyas* which affect all five dimensions or *koshas* simultaneously. If awakening takes place before the practitioner is purified or ready, a split personality syndrome happens, like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, but in the positive sense Mrs Yogi and Mr Bhogi. Mrs Yogi is aware and in control, involved in the process of yoga, while Mr Bhogi loses contact with himself and starts to indulge in the sensorial dimension, creating an imbalance. This imbalance can also cause a shift to take place in the normal state of mind and make you slightly abnormal. These abnormal people are known as the kundalini cracks, and this is known as the kundalini crack-up syndrome. Therefore, please do not take *kriya yoga* lightly; it is not like your daily practice of *surya namaskara* or *yoga nidra*, no. It is a high potency dose to all the systems of your body and to all the *koshas*.

Another important thing to remember is that there are different systems within the *koshas*, one being the system

of nadis. The nadi system is in pranayama kosha, and they are conductors of pranic energy. Their physical equivalents are the nerves. The nadis need to be purified and awakened before further steps can be taken in kriya yoga. The yogis have said that if there is a blockage in the flow of prana shakti, if there is some form of barrier in the smooth flow of prana, it will manifest as either a psychological or physiological imbalance, so purification of the nadis is an important aspect to consider.

The awakening of the pranas is the second step, after purification of the nadis. According to yogic theory, the pranic energy in our body has different roles to perform. Each manifestation of prana is recognized by a different name, and controls a specific organ or area of the physical body, and a specific activity of the mind. The various manifestations of prana shakti move in different directions, not in unison. Their awakening is not uniform, at present they are dissipated. Therefore, in the second step of kriya yoga sadhana, the pranas are awakened.

The third step is the awakening of the chakras, situated in vijñanamaya kosha or the causal body. The chakras contain paths of energy and paths of consciousness. There is a merger of energy and consciousness, so when the chakras awaken, the corresponding energy and the experience related to a particular level of consciousness are also awakened. Chakra awakening is not mental or pranic and it definitely does not take place in annamaya kosha, the physical body. It takes place in vijñanamaya kosha, the fourth dimension.

After chakra awakening, the fourth stage is the awakening of kundalini. Kundalini begins to move from mooladhara to sahasrara. This is the process, in brief.

Kriya yoga is not the instant yoga for attaining self-realization that many people may think. Rather, it is an involved process of rediscovering different dimensions of our life, nature and energy. Physiological and psychological symptoms can be experienced as a result of this awakening

even though the actual awakening is in the dimension of vijñānamaya. During awakening some people may experience shooting pains or a sensation like liquid fire up the spine, for example. If you practise kriya yoga sincerely, after the right preparation, with the right attitude and at the right time, then it becomes a very powerful tool. It is like the national highway. Once you get on it the road is straight; you put your foot down and off you go. The journey can take time, maybe a few weeks, months, years or lifetimes, depending from where you start, but kriya yoga has no bends, it is absolutely straight!

There are two ways of practising the kriyas. When you are learning, you have to practise the full form for at least two years, and during that time it is not necessary to practise all twenty kriyas in one day. You can practise one kriya in its full form every day, first one today, second one tomorrow, third one the day after, and after twenty days you begin again. That is one method. After two years of intensive kriya practice, the short variation is practised, in groups of three. This gradual preparation is necessary. If you try the full form of all twenty in one day, it takes about four hours. To begin with, we do not have four hours to spare and if we attempt it we will drown. Train yourself to swim gradually. If you jump into the middle of the ocean before you can swim, you will drown. Tread the path slowly, carefully and gradually.

What do you think of a guru who uses marijuana, heroin, hashish, and similar substances for spiritual practices?

I do not know about gurus, but I do know that some yogis use them, because yoga has accepted them. In *Yoga Sūtras* herbs are mentioned as an aid to self-realization. Under the category of herbs come marijuana, bhang and ganja, and there is nothing wrong with their use. You may misuse it out of ignorance and get addicted to it, because you cannot live without it, but if you use it the way the yogis do, it becomes a tool for internalization, and a method of developing a sharper perception, and of awakening more brain cells. You

should not use it only to feel, “Wow, this is fantastic, I can see the aura of everyone!” No, I would not suggest it for that kind of nonsense.

The *nagas*, yogis who remain naked throughout their lives, use it a lot. Some well known, public-figure sannyasins have used it in the past, and maybe some use it today, and there is nothing wrong with it. These herbs help the sadhaka or yoga aspirant to overcome the natural instincts. To manage the instincts has always been a big problem for everyone. How many people can manage anger? Very few. How many people can manage fear? How many people can manage their ego? How many people can manage their having, or not having, self-esteem?

What about our cravings? There are four cravings according to yoga. The first is food, in order to survive. That is known as *ahara*. The second is sleep; every aspect of nature needs to rest: vegetable life, plant life, animals, birds, children and adults. That is the *nidra* instinct. The third is *bhaya*, or fear, fear of the unknown, uncertainty about the future, insecurity about oneself. The fourth is *maithuna*, sexual desire, the instinct of multiplying. These are the four basic instincts in every human being. Even in deep states of meditation you will suddenly receive a pull from any of these four, depending on which is the most predominant in your life at the time.

Some people concentrate only on food. Eating is their joy and happiness. I have seen people who live to eat and they are also very happy people. Some people, and I was one of them, love to sleep. I enjoy sleeping, and deep sleep, total unconsciousness, used to be the priority. In fact Sri Swamiji used to say, “You can lift Niranjan on your shoulder when he is sleeping and take him to Jamalpur and leave him there, he won’t know that he has gone there.” That used to be a very active vritti in me which I was fortunately able to overcome. Today, I can survive with the bare minimum of sleep and it never poses a problem for me. There are some people who are sex maniacs. There is no reason to deny it because it

is a natural fact of life. In order to subdue the intensity of these instincts during the sadhana period, yogis have used different kinds of herbal drugs to still the vrittis, and this is also an accepted process in yoga.

Why does everyone want the guru to behave according to their liking, but no one wants to behave according to the liking of the guru?

Everybody has an image of what they would like to become in their lifetime. That image is then superimposed on the one who bears the closest resemblance to their ideal, so they make them their guru. Their interaction with the guru is then based on this ideal. This is one quality of discipleship.

Another form of discipleship is when the disciple has no expectations concerning the guru. Sri Swamiji gave a very good example in relation to this when he said, "Suppose you go to the loo, the washroom, and do a big one, number two, and as you get up your diamond ring falls into the centre of the big one. What do you do? Do you ignore it and press the flush or do you somehow save that diamond ring, wash it, and wear it again. Who would flush it? No one. That means everyone would try to take it out. Similarly, no matter how or who the guru is, drunkard, womanizer or perfect being, there has to be an acceptance of who she or he is without any superimposition of ideas." This is also another quality of discipleship.

Why does one need a guru?

I can only speak for myself; you must answer this for yourself. I need a guru. Guru is not a person. Guru is not an individual who is labelled Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Sivananda, Ramana Maharshi, Anandamayi Ma, Amritanandamayi Ma, or Satyananda. Guru is a direction, a vision.

In this context, what is the meaning of the word *guru*? Dispeller of darkness. What is dispelled? Ignorance. What is ignorance? It is the inability to adjust to situations in life pertaining to the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions.

We recognize our guru as being somebody who can inspire us, guide us, and tell us, "Look this is how you can adjust to life; this is how you can become a better person; this is how you can improve yourself."

The being who is identified as the guru on the physical plane is the role model for people to emulate. Through emulation and understanding, the veils of *avidya*, ignorance, can be removed from one's nature. The teacher in school and the professor in the university are also gurus, because they arm us with certain skills that enable us to progress in life. Parents are gurus, because they provide us with the basic raw materials for the development of our personality. A spiritual master is a guru, because she or he provides us with inspiration to follow a path in which we can bring forth our best human qualities. In the Indian tradition, spiritual masters have been recognized as the gurus who dispel the darkness of *avidya*, and who can enlighten us so we can become better and more complete human beings. You have to decide whether you need a guru or not.

Can you explain the celebration of Diwali? What is the special significance of it?

Diwali can be compared to Halloween, the night of the spirits. The lights are lit and displayed so that these spirits may pass on to the next realm and be free from the bondage of the earth. It is also considered to be the day when Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth according to Hindu mythology, visits and it is a day of Lakshmi pooja. She is the consort of Lord Vishnu who takes birth as various avatars.

In the Indian concept of the trinity, first is Brahma the creator. His work is only to manufacture, he creates life. Second is Vishnu, the protector and preserver. His duty is to maintain the balance of good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, dharma and adharma, and for that he has had to manifest as many avatars. Rama is one of the avatars of Vishnu, and Krishna is another. These are the two most

well known ones. Shiva's work is to meditate, and when he is not meditating he is destroying. He cannot have a normal, peaceful life. Shiva lives in extremes. He is either at total peace in samadhi, oblivious to everything that is happening around him, or he is so ferocious that he is ready to burn even Kamadeva, the lord of passion. When Shiva becomes active, he dances his cosmic dance and the world dissolves, falls apart, shatters. He opens his third eye and burns someone to ashes. He could swallow poison and survive. He can hold the purity of the intellect. He can use the raw energy of kundalini, and was often in a mischievous mood.

On Diwali there are lights, fireworks, bombs, everything goes off on that day!

With all the knowledge and wisdom India has, why is there so much poverty here, at least in comparison to other countries?

We look at a country today from a financial, economic, gain-oriented perspective. Countries are labelled 'rich', 'affluent', 'poor', 'third world', 'other world', and so on; however, that is only according to the economic, gain-oriented perspective. However, in order to understand the nature of a nation, we have to look, not at how people eat, talk, or walk, but at what they think about, what they feel and believe in.

There are two kinds of society. I would not call India a poor society. It is a very affluent society. True, there may be economic and financial poverty. Many do not have enough money to feed themselves and their families, I am not denying that. However, if people have nothing to eat for two or three days, survive only on water, and are happy and healthy, act and think properly, have good thoughts about others and are receptive and open, they are better off than people who are affluent but sick, surviving on medications, suffering from cancer and other illnesses which are difficult to cure. They may not have values in their life, only problems and difficulties within the family. On one hand, we have a society which is affluent economically and financially, but

with imbalances in other areas of life. On the other hand, we have a society which is poor economically and financially, but which has very strong attributes in other areas of life.

When you look at the nature of a nation, you have to recognize the spiritual aspect. There are many skills and sciences all over the world: modern, materialistic, abstract, philosophical, spiritualistic, and we go to different places to learn them. In order to learn acupuncture, you go to China, not America. In order to learn yoga, you go to India not Timbuktu. Knowing one's *swabhava* or nature is better than having letters after one's name. I do not consider that we are deprived and poor; that is only the financial, economic view. Our wealth is in our knowledge and wisdom, and in other areas of life there is a goodness which is recognized by everyone and for which people aspire. These are great assets.

It is said that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. So what does it mean when someone says, "You are looking very beautiful"? Is beauty a kind of makeup, or an effort to be beautiful?

Beauty is a natural quality in everyone, and this natural beauty can be brought out by different methods.

Once there was a king named Bhartihari, who wrote one hundred aphorisms on detachment known as *Vairagya Shatak*. He also wrote one hundred aphorisms on beauty, and how to make one beautiful, known as *Sringar Shatak*. There is nothing wrong with looking beautiful. Beauty manifests on the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. When spiritual beauty awakens and your spirit becomes cosmic, then external aids to beauty do not really matter. When beauty comes alive in the mental dimension, with the awakening of good, positive and creative qualities, then you do not need any external aids to look beautiful.

To look beautiful physically is a normal human desire, and why not? We all need to be appreciated at some level, so let us start with beauty. We all need to be loved and appreciated. We

all need to be recognized, and *sringar*, or the art of looking beautiful, is a subject which has been dealt with, even in the tantras, because the spiritual traditions do not see beauty as an impediment to spiritual growth. Rather, it reflects the beauty all around, and therefore there is nothing wrong with it. If somebody says to you that you are beautiful, you should be happy that somebody is recognizing the fact. Why not?

Have you ever ridden a horse, and if you have, can you see any relationship between the art and science of horsemanship and yoga? I have discovered that horseriding is more fun than yoga.

I agree. I love many things, and horses are one of them. In my young days, I was a very good rider and I believe I still am. I used to have three horses in Colombia and I trained them myself. I used to play a lot of games: riding bareback, jumping from a horse while it was cantering and picking up objects from the ground while the horse was galloping. Horseriding was one of my favourite hobbies and I agree with the statement that horseriding is more fun than yoga. If I had the opportunity, I would prefer horseriding to practising meditation.

As far as the relationship between yoga and horseriding is concerned, every field of life is an art. Music is an art, horseriding is an art, golf is an art, and even driving a car is an art. Some forms of art are more involving than others, but everything is an art, from eating, sleeping and drinking to laughing and walking. It is the perfection of an art that makes one a qualified teacher or master. From that point of view, yoga is an art and horseriding is also an art, because both require involvement and skill, awareness and concentration. Choose an art for yourself, it can even be a hobby, which can improve your life and bring you fulfilment.

To what extent do you regard yourself as a vulnerable man?

I am very vulnerable, no doubt. I get hurt by naughty things and elated by other things. That is human nature. How

can we avoid it? Vulnerability is the nature of the human personality, which gives us the experience of raga and dwesha. If we were not vulnerable, then we would not care about raga and dwesha; we would be beyond the effects and influences of creation. We are all very vulnerable people. Vulnerability is the symptom of people who are affected by raga and dwesha.

In the course of our spiritual and yoga practices, we try to organize our life. We use the word 'transcend'. Transcendence implies the proper organization of the events, situations and influences which affect our expressions, in order that we can be free from the influences of raga and dwesha. Vulnerability is an inherent part of life which nobody can deny, reject or renounce.

What is auspicious, in a spiritual sense? How does it manifest in our daily lives? Is there any yoga sadhana to develop and preserve it?

The nature of creation, the universe and life is satyam, shivam and sundaram. *Satyam* means real or true, *shivam* means auspicious and *sundaram* means beautiful. These are the attributes of God and creation. One cannot think of God or creation without auspiciousness, beauty and truth.

However, we have cataracts in our physical eyes and our third eye is closed. Shiva has three eyes. His spiritual third eye remains closed when his two physical eyes are open; the third eye opens only when the two physical eyes close. The two physical eyes see the world of duality while the third, which sees only the unity, remains closed. When the third eye opens, the other two close. Our vision is clouded and covered by many layers of samskaras and karmas, known as *maya*.

In the *Ramacharitamanas* it is said, "Realize everything to be maya, as far as you can perceive, realize everything to be illusion, as far as your understanding can go, because in this earthly, physical, material dimension of which we are a part, what we experience is a transition from one form into

another, from one state of being into another.” Transitions can never indicate the true reality which is eternal and unchanging. Everything that is continuously changing and evolving should be recognized as being a part of the realm of maya.

If we can maintain an awareness of the changing perceptions in life, of the different phases of our consciousness, then a new type of consciousness will dawn. This is the aim of yoga which says that you have to live in the world; however, you should be unaffected by it. Do not deny anything in life, accept everything, but remain unaffected by life's situations.

Our obsession with worldly objects causes us to lose the vision of auspiciousness, beauty and truth. A *sadhaka* or aspirant needs to have a different kind of awareness so as not to be affected by *raga* or *dwesha*, attraction and attachment to the sensorial world, or repulsion and rejection of it. When this awareness is maintained one realizes that auspiciousness, beauty and truth are an inherent part of creation, that they are attributes of God, just as there is butter, yoghurt and cheese in milk although we cannot see them. In order to separate butter from milk, there is a process. In order to convert milk into cheese, there is a process. Similarly, in order to get rid of cataracts from the eyes there is a process, and that process is sadhana, yoga, surrendering oneself to the divine will. Through this process, you will realize that you have been sitting in the ocean of auspiciousness continuously, and you have forgotten it is your real nature.

If you wish to transform a selfish ideal into a universal ideal, what means could you use to stop yourself from being thwarted?

I do not understand the question, because I do not believe that anybody can be stopped from expressing their creativity. If you want to convert a selfish ideal into a universal ideal, creativity cannot be thwarted or stopped.

We come down to the basics here. Selfish ideals belong to the realm of ego; unselfish ideals belong to the realm of spirit. As long as you are in the realm of ego, there are going to be problems; you will have to struggle externally and also with yourself. In the process of sadhana, if you are able to transform the ego, remove individuality and connect with your inner spirit, then I do not see any problem. The same action, desire or thought which was selfish previously, will now become universal.

One can train oneself to become a universal person. Sri Swamiji had given indications to this effect when he told us to connect with other people. If you are able to connect with other people, then your attitude and beliefs will change. I remember Sri Swamiji saying once, “When you go to the market to buy clothes for your children, buy one extra set and a pair of shoes for a person who is needy, who deserves it, and who can use it properly.” If you have the ability, help some poor family.

This is a simple thing, but at the same time it is a very high sadhana. You are not adopting anybody, because once you adopt someone, the feeling of ‘me’ comes in again, “This child is mine and I am responsible for her.” No. You have to go beyond the idea of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ The moment you go beyond this idea, you are overcoming your own ego, because it is the ego which identifies with ‘me’ and ‘mine’. That is one way the ego can be transcended, and how we can connect with the nature of spirit, which is all-pervasive and universal. A universal idea is one which allows us to connect with, and feel for, other people, apart from our own immediate family.

How should one deal with a deep personal truth that is incompatible with one’s family, environment and society? Can ignoring the truth about oneself lead to serious health complications?

At this point, having an understanding of dharma should guide you. What is the dharma of every individual, and what

are the priorities of dharma? We have to look at the concept of dharma in a broader context, remembering that we are only a unit of the family, society, community and the cosmos. Our dharma begins at the cosmic level, and then it comes down to the level of humanity, then to the level of society and finally the individual level.

Due to misconception, we consider that dharma begins with the individual, and it does begin with the individual, in the sense that one has to train oneself to realize one's dharma; however, initially the expression of dharma takes place at the cosmic level. Those people who are aware of dharma always try to maintain balance and harmony in their environment. If necessary, they are prepared for a certain amount of self-sacrifice too, until they are able to convince other people of their need to follow their path in life.

There is no need to define what dharma is in detail. It has been said again and again, that *dharma* is a collection of three aspects: truthful character, truthful thought and truthful action. Truthful thought is based on the process of discrimination or *viveka*, awareness, and a clear understanding of the environment and situations one has to confront. From truthful thought comes natural, spontaneous action, and when that type of action is performed there are no reactions and hence no karmic effects. This leads to the transformation of character and behaviour, and consequently to the transformation of the whole personality. These are the three major components of dharma: *sat vichara*, truthful thoughts; *sat karma*, truthful or righteous actions; and *sat vyavahara*, truthful character, nature or personality.

The important thing to remember here is the word *sat*, truth. What is the meaning of truth? Somebody once asked this question of Mulla Nasruddin, a great Sufi saint. Nasruddin said, "Truth is something that I have never spoken in my life." Truth is not what you speak, understand or feel. Truth is knowledge of the reality behind appearance, behind personal thoughts, ambitions, desires, and individuality. In order to realize our truthful nature, we

have to work very hard. We have to put in a lot of effort to discover the source of the truth.

Once you discover the centre or source of truth, there cannot be any more conflict. The expression of that truthful nature changes the environment, converts the negativity of the people around you, so they come forward spontaneously to support you. This has been the experience of people who have experimented with truth, whether it is Gandhi, Swami Satyananda, Ramana Maharshi or anybody else. Dharma flowers when it is in the company of truth. Dharma blooms when truth is an integral part of it. Conversely, dharma becomes stagnant and full of conflict when truth is absent and only desire is there. One has to simply try to understand the nature of things before attempting to alter external situations and conflicts, before attempting to experience peace in strife.

Many people believe that this is an auspicious time for humanity and the planet earth, that we are all ascending into a higher dimension where we will live in harmony, and that many of us have a role as light workers. Can you comment on this and tell us what you see ahead for us as we enter the new millennium?

I am sure that there are many theories, and many people have written many books on such subjects. I have also read quite a few of them; however, I do not agree with any of them. The fact is that we are continuously evolving, and this evolution can be experienced in many ways: greater understanding, knowledge, wisdom, insight into spiritual life, and hopefully, application of that understanding. Just having the understanding is not enough, just knowing something is not enough, just writing something is not enough. You must live what you preach. How many people have lived what they have taught? You can count them on your fingers.

Some people paint a very optimistic picture of humanity while others paint a very pessimistic one. Both are incorrect. It is easy to say that we will be beings of light, but in order to

become a being of light, you first have to deal with the mind. Although people may know what is right and what is wrong, the application of that knowledge is very difficult for most.

In the coming millennia, if our civilization survives, there is going to be a lot of strife and not harmony. I can assure you of that. There is going to be a lot of strife and not harmony, and each one of us will have to work very hard to experience peace and harmony within. Therefore, in the coming millennia we will have to be more determined to maintain our own balance. That is a fact.

What is the fantasy for the coming millennia? Sure, we will all be flying from here to there covered in light, communicating telepathically, buzzing each other without the phone, seeing things that are happening many miles away in our chidakasha. These are fantasies and they do not represent the existing reality.

If you want to know what will happen in the future you have to analyze the present, and this is what Sri Swamiji was saying. Strife will continue, wars will continue, destruction will continue, everything will continue as they have always done in human history; simultaneously, the effort to change will always continue. If we can motivate more and more people to change so that we become the majority, then there is more chance of peace and harmony, but if the destructive forces come into the majority, then it will be a very pessimistic picture for humanity.

The next age has to be one of conviction and determined action. Sri Swamiji has said it is to be an age of bhakti. Sure, if we can manage our emotions, then definitely some transformation will take place in society. If we can manage our thoughts, not only on an individual basis but on a global basis, definitely some change will occur in society; however, this requires determined effort from everyone.

Many people have written that the earth is now going through a different phase, that everybody will be experiencing peace and bliss and that they will be able to do many extraordinary things. Some people said it was

going to happen in the sixties, but nothing happened. Others said it would happen in the seventies, but nothing happened. I do not know why we keep on postponing everything!

Those people who understand human nature and the law of karma, who can perceive the destiny of humanity as a whole and the direction in which it is going, would give a different indication of how events are going. They would give us a practical guideline, not just mere fantasy. I read a book, which sold about three million copies in the first print. It said that the earth was going to go through some cosmic bombardment of certain rays on the 16th of August 1997, and that during that time there would be three twenty-four hour periods of continuous night, after which we would emerge into a new dimension. I stayed up the whole night waiting for my body to become light and levitate, but nothing happened.

It seems that most yoga practices were devised by men for men. What relevance do they have for women?

This question must be from somebody who differentiates between men and women. Physically, mentally and emotionally, a man and a woman may be different, but the spiritual aspiration of a man and a woman is the same. It is incorrect to say that most of the yoga practices were devised by men for men. It means that you have not been able to fully understand the yogic ideas, structure and belief.

How can meditation be different for men and women? How can developing qualities be different for men and women? How can prana, ida and pingala, the chakras and kundalini be different for men and women? These are the things that yoga talks about. Yoga speaks of prana, the awakening of prana shakti, harmonizing and balancing ida and pingala nadis, awakening kundalini and the chakras, the kriya practices, and much more. Are these yogic concepts different for men and women? Will only men awaken their chakras and only women awaken their

kundalini? Does there have to be a partition between the two? No, there cannot be a partition.

Yoga speaks of five bodies and their awakening. First is annamaya kosha, for the awakening of which we practise asana, pranayama and the shatkarmas. Will they give different results and benefits to the different sexes? Is manomaya kosha, the entire structure of mind, different in men and women? One aspect can be more predominant in either gender, certainly, just as the right or left hemisphere is sometimes more predominant in our body. The left hemisphere is generally more predominant in people who are artistic and creative, and the right hemisphere is generally more predominant in people with linear and mathematical minds. That is only one manifestation of the total mind. If we are dealing with the awakening of the manomaya kosha, there cannot be any difference.

You may say that women are more psychic than men, fine, but you are talking of only one attribute, not of the total nature of women and men. Therefore, yoga is not devised by men for men, but by thinkers who saw both sexes as a part of the whole, as a part of the same humanity having the need to evolve. Therefore the question itself is wrong!

How can we be better communicators? How can we best deal with those we live and work with who do not communicate well, and how can we learn to manage the irritation and anger that bad communication can cause in us?

Good communication is an outcome of people respecting one another. Good communication is an outcome of people trusting and believing in each other. In order to develop belief, trust and understanding of the other person's abilities, you have to be open-minded. You always have to put yourself in the shoes of other people and not just look at the world from your own point of view. This is what I have learned from Sri Swamiji. I have seen him interact with so many

people in the ashram and in Deoghar, and I have seen his ability to communicate with each person at their own level. To children he will tell them something in a very playful and joyful mood so that they can understand it, while to intellectuals he will tell the same thing in a different way so they will understand. To a person who is suffering he will tell the same thing in yet a different way. Adaptation and recognition of another person's ability and level of understanding is of prime importance in developing better communication skills.

If Sri Swamiji speaks high-flying philosophy all the time, people will respect him because he speaks something they cannot speak; however, it will not have any real meaning for them. He imparts truth by becoming an example, and each one of us can see what kind of teaching he is imparting from our own perspective. Communication is based on mutual respect and understanding of each other's abilities, limitations and skills, and by building up faith and trust. Both sides have to work at it. If you are more aware of this, then put your foot forward first and help others to put their foot forward. If you are not aware, do not talk about it and stay in the background.

How important is celibacy in the sannyasa tradition?

It is a requirement of sannyasa; however, there are different systems of sannyasa now. In jignasu and karma sannyasa, restrictions on celibacy do not apply. In the poorna sannyasa that is followed outside India, this also does not apply. However, in orthodox sannyasa, which is followed by certain sects in India, celibacy is followed very strictly.

There is a sect here in India known as the *nagas*. They are sadhus, sannyasins, who remain in their birthday suits because they are not permitted to wear clothes. For them, celibacy is a very important and necessary discipline. Some even go to the extent of crushing their sexual organs. Then there are other traditions. In the Vaishnava tradition of sannyasa, those who can follow celibacy should do so, but

for those who cannot it does not matter. They are known as *swamis* and *goswamis*. The swamis are those who follow celibacy and the goswamis are the 'gone' ones. In the Shaiva and Dashnami traditions, there are sects which emphasize the need for celibacy. Different sects and traditions have evolved their own rules regarding celibacy in accordance with the times.

In general, the sannyasa tradition speaks of restraint. It is one of the *niyamas* or disciplines of sannyasa. You hear the word *brahmacharya* in the yogic tradition also: *satya*, *ahimsa*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, but in the yogic context *brahmacharya* does not mean celibacy. It means dedication to truth, and the realization of divinity or higher nature. Many people translate the word *brahmacharya* as meaning celibacy, but that is incorrect. Yoga does not say that in order to perfect yoga you have to be celibate. No. In order to perfect yoga, you need to be true to your goal, and that is *brahmacharya*.

In sannyasa, *sanyam* and celibacy are defined as *indriya sanyam*, restraint of the senses, and *mana sanyam*, restraint of the mind, stopping it from pursuing the objects of desire and sensuality, and the whole concept is different. You begin with one. If it is easy for you to understand *mana sanyam*, begin with that. If it is easier for you to understand *indriya sanyam*, begin with that. Begin wherever you have a proper understanding and apply it in your life. In order to perfect celibacy, certain disciplines need to be followed. Just by saying, "From today I'll be celibate", is not going to help anybody. You need to create a change in your lifestyle, *sadhana*, attitude, and quality of desires. In order to perfect celibacy you have to change your lifestyle. You cannot continue to live the same kind of life and say, "I am celibate from today." It is impossible. You may be celibate physically, but mentally, what happens? You are dreaming about and desiring everything. What kind of celibacy is that? Mental obsession is worse than physical involvement! Mental obsession is worse than having an actual physical relationship.

Once there were two swamis who went for a dip in the Ganga, prior to their initiation. After taking their bath they were walking back to their ashram along the river bank, when they saw a beautiful young girl who was unable to cross a little stream. One of the swamis realized the difficulty and asked, "Can we help you to cross over?" She replied, "Yes please, I don't want to get my sari wet." So the swami, who was a hefty guy, lifted her up, carried her across the stream and put her down on the other side. The other swami just went into a state of shock, "I'm going to complain to Swamiji! How can you think of touching a woman?" He arrived back at the ashram in a huff and told the guru, "Swamiji, do you know what happened? You won't believe it! Never again am I going to go out with Swami Bigheart. I am so angry. I can't even tell you what happened!" Finally, when the guru found out what actually happened he said, "Swami Bigheart, out of compassion, helped the girl in her distress and left her on the other side of the stream, but you have carried her all the way here, and are still carrying her in your mind!" The real reason for that swami's anger was that he himself had wanted to carry her across and was not able to recognize the fact.

This story shows that mental thought and obsession is worse than any kind of physical interaction and therefore celibacy should be understood more from the point of view of the mind, feelings and emotions, which can take a very dangerous form. People can become maniacs and psychotics, just by obsessive thinking. Everyday we read about it in the newspaper and see it on television, and it can happen to anybody and everybody. Therefore, the sannyasa tradition speaks of restraint of emotions, restraint of thought, and restraint of the senses, in order to be free from the obsessive nature of the mind.

A prominent physicist, Stephen Hawkins, has written that he wants to discover the laws of the universe so as to

understand the mind of God. Would you like to comment on this?

Yes. If you can understand the laws that govern the entire universe, then maybe you can have just a peephole into the mind of God, because God is not just the universe, and our understanding of the universe is an incomplete understanding. When scientists talk about the universe, they are talking of the physical universe, and only now have we been able to discover a tiny part of this physical universe. Whatever we could do with our own telescopes we have done. Now, with the Hubble telescope we can see a bit more. In the future, with other forms of instruments, we will be able to see greater areas. Understanding the laws of creation is as complex as understanding the laws and nature of the human mind. I wish Mr Hawkins luck. All I can do is to send him my good wishes so that he can accomplish what he wants. If he can do it, he will be a greater master than Jesus, Buddha, Confucius and everybody put together.

The universe is not only material. Science has discovered only three dimensions of existence. It speculates, and we have come to a conclusion about the fourth. Does it end here? No, it does not. Science talks of a fourth dimension, it has not yet started to talk about the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth or the tenth.

The yogic tradition talks about twenty-one dimensions. The seven higher dimensions are the *lokas*, or planes, from bhu loka to satya loka. These dimensions actually exist, they are not just concepts. The seven lower dimensions are the patalas. There are also seven dimensions in this visible, manifest universe, of which science has only discovered four. We live in the third. The entire universe which we perceive today, with all our wisdom, knowledge and equipment, belongs to the third dimension. Whether black holes, quasars, red giants or blue dwarfs; they only exist in the third dimension. Thus, it seems like a big impossibility to discover the laws of the universe and understand the mind of God, but nevertheless, let us wish him luck.

The material is only one aspect in the twenty-one dimensions or layers of existence. In the course of time, as our understanding develops, we may be able to discover more about the other dimensions, and by the time we reach the twenty-first, we will see that there are dimensions extending beyond that. After all, how can infinite space and time be limited to twenty-one dimensions?

So the concepts which have to be remembered when considering this question are infinite space and infinite time. From infinite space comes finite time. From finite time comes a single-dimensional being. We are all single-dimensional beings. Therefore the journey is a long one, a very long one indeed!

What is the appropriate response to the death of a great spiritual teacher with whom one has had a close connection? How does one continue?

You continue as before, what else is there to do? How can you expect that somebody is not going to die? If you have to come to this world then you also have to go from here, there is no question about it. If the body has taken birth, it is the dharma of the body to die. Death is inevitable, and humans have the most surprising attitude about death. We know it is inevitable yet we do not associate with the concept, with the idea of death. We do not understand the concept or idea of death and dying, although it is the law of nature.

Even a person who is considered to be God incarnate cannot live forever. There can be different lifespans, sure. A *bhogi* or person who indulges in the world may live for seventy to eighty years, the average lifespan today. A *yogi*, one who has perfected yoga, can live a bit longer, past the century mark. A *siddha* can live still longer. One can increase the span of life; however, one cannot conquer death. Nobody has been able to do that. It is not the nature of *prakriti* or *purusha*, death is inevitable.

Now, we have the human factor of insecurity and attachment, which takes many different forms and binds us

to one another. Insecurity is the cause of attachment and it comes in many disguises. For some, insecurity can be in relation to money, so their hero is a rich person. For others, insecurity can be about power, so the object of adoration for them is a powerful figure. For many, the insecurity is sensuality and they identify with a person who is very sensual. Many others are insecure in relation to love, so they identify with somebody who fulfils that need; or the need can be spiritual and then one identifies with the person who fulfils their spiritual need. The underlying factor is insecurity. Insecurity is the cause of attachment related to the emotions, thoughts, desires, feelings and ambitions. When you attach your insecurity, in whatever form it may be, to the guru or an enlightened being, it means that you are looking at a role model for guidance, inspiration and motivation.

If the attachment with the guru is only as a role model then there is no problem, no conflict, but if you become attached to the physical body of the guru then, point one, it is incorrect. Point two, you will flounder because after the departure of that being, you will not have any direction. Point three, in the course of time you will become a fundamentalist and orthodox, a victim of the 'Guru said' syndrome, the 'Swamiji said' syndrome. Then this 'Swamiji said' syndrome appears everywhere. Whatever you wish to do, you will always say, "Swamiji said, 'Do this'; Swamiji said, 'Do that'; guru said, 'Do this'; guru said, 'Do that'." The orthodox or fundamentalist nature evolves from this type of attitude, and we all suffer from this syndrome.

The answer is simple; connect yourself with the inspiration coming from the being to which you have attached yourself. Of course, it is difficult, but how you identify with that inspiration and guidance also has to be part of your sadhana. If you can identify with that you will always see the beauty in everything.

Why do Indians adore the river Ganges? It looks so dirty, with corpses floating in it and industrial waste being dumped in. For many it is a normal river; however, Indians believe

that it symbolizes purity, that it represents something great and divine. They are not put off by its dirtiness but adore it like a goddess. We have to see beyond the physical aspect, to go beyond the appearance and experience the reality. We desire to identify with the reality, but we identify only with the appearance.

An enlightened master, a *guru*, represents a higher level of being whether you call it perfection, harmony or wisdom. However, because these concepts are so abstract, we cannot really identify with them; they are not an actual part of our mentality. It is only folly, a shortcoming of human nature that makes us think, “What do I do after the guru or an enlightened being departs?” It is our mistake. If we feel that way, it means we have not imbibed the teachings in the true spirit. Rather, we have created an association with a person who lives on a higher plane or dimension, but that association is very gross and mundane.

Just as we can think of a person as a friend, husband, wife or companion, in a similar manner we think of a person as a guru. We have brought the concept and image of an enlightened being down to a very gross plane where there is physical, not spiritual identification. If there is spiritual identification, no problem, but if there is physical identification there will be a big problem, so you decide.

What makes a human being human?

A human being is a person who understands the art of living. The art of living is the following of *dharma*, which is defined as righteous, pious, harmonious and truthful thought, action, behaviour and attitude. These are the qualities which make a human being human. In the absence of such qualities, humans sometimes become lower than animals.

We are actually not humans. We label ourselves as humankind, but in reality we are not part of humankind. In reality we are part of demonkind. In our minds, the destructive qualities of anger, frustration, hatred and jealousy are more powerful than the good, positive qualities.

Membership to humankind is therefore given to very few people who are known as saints, the dharmic people. Being human is about understanding the art of harmonious and balanced living, from the most material and gross to the most spiritual and transcendental.

The saints, rishis and gurus, the enlightened beings who have come from time to time to guide us, have always stressed that we need to undergo a process of transformation, and to develop understanding and selfless qualities. Whatever the sages, saints and seers have said are guidelines for us to become part of the human club. Right now, we are not part of that club.

With reference to the Patanjali sutra which tells us to be friendly towards those who are happy and content, and to have compassion for those who are unfortunate, the latter seems easier. Why is it so difficult not to be envious of those who are happy and successful, and so difficult not to wish that our rivals, who also may be our friends or co-workers, will actually trip up and make mistakes, etc.?

Some truths and spiritual ideals are eternal. If you find difficulty in practising them it is because of your mentality, your lack of understanding and training in respect to realizing that concept.

You have to deal with this from your own perspective, I cannot say, "This is easy and that is difficult." One has to climb the hill oneself. The first two steps may be easy, but as the legs get tired you will find the going difficult. There may even be times when you become totally exhausted and need to sit down and rest; however, still you have to continue to climb the hill to achieve the aim, to reach the target.

There is no general answer for understanding universal truths. I do not find them difficult to understand and therefore I cannot understand your question, because if you find them to be so difficult you will not understand my answer. If the first step is difficult for you, the second step will not be possible. First, you have to understand your own personality,

mentality, strengths and weaknesses, and try to build up your strengths and overcome your limitations and weaknesses. This is the only advice I can give you at present.

Who were the rishis who generated the Vedas?

The word *rishi* means seer, one who has complete vision, who is aware of the past, lives in the present, and has a vision of the future. The rishis attained a higher state of being through the process of sadhana and living a particular lifestyle. They were able to observe society, understand its physical and spiritual needs, and devise methods of bringing the material and spiritual aspects closer to each other so that the wholeness of life could be experienced.

The word *veda* means knowledge. Even today in quite a few European languages 'veda' is the word for knowledge. The Sanskrit root *vid* means to know or realize. The Vedas are original thoughts, a specific kind of thought pattern which existed in humanity at one time. The rishis thought about the social norms, disciplines and laws, about the various modes of living in different groups, communities, castes and creeds, and created a code of conduct for people to follow so that they could express their nature confidently. Many rishis gave people insight into their materialistic nature, while others gave them insight into their spiritual nature. These various reflections were compiled into the Vedas. There is no one author of the Vedas.

In one Veda, so many different rishis have expressed their views. Today, we are aware of only 108 *shakhas*, or branches of the Vedas; however, the total number of works or treatises is over a million.

The rishis looked into each and every sphere of life, from the mundane, gross and physical to the spiritual and transcendental. They discussed agriculture, astronomy, astrology, and everything in the Vedas. It is not only spiritual literature.

In modern language we could call the rishis scientists. If we start compiling all the work of Einstein, Newton and each

and every scientist who gave us the locomotive, telephone and electricity into a book of humanity, three to five thousand years down the line that book will be recognized as a Veda, perhaps the fifth Veda. Why not? It is a compilation of human understanding and experience. The rishis were scientists.

You have told us about the use of mantra and symbol. How relevant are these practices for somebody who can easily hear psychic sounds or nada?

Psychic sounds come up naturally and spontaneously; they are not something which one should try to awaken wilfully outside a meditative environment, for example, when you are driving a car or are engrossed in some other activity which requires your alertness. For each kind of experience there is a different environment, and in order to awaken, listen and experience the psychic sounds you need a special environment.

There is fluctuation of attention from psychic to outside sounds, then back to psychic sounds, to what is happening outside, to psychic sounds, to awareness of the body, to psychic sounds, again to awareness of some childhood memory and more, back and forth, the jumping of the mind. When the mind is jumping there can be no focus or depth in the practice. You just hear the sound, enjoy it while you listen to it and do not think about it when you are not listening. This is what generally happens.

The symbol and mantra help create the proper mental environment. The mantra helps to still the vrittis while the symbol or yantra helps to harmonize the unconscious streams of samskaras and karmic influence in the unconscious mind. Only when the vrittis are pacified with the mantra, and the consciousness is harmonized through the sadhana of yantra, can the awareness of psychic sound become a permanent and uplifting experience giving you the option of going deep to trace the psychic sounds to their source. Therefore, regardless of whether you hear a psychic sound or not, mantra and symbol have to be practised regularly without a break.

What were Sri Swamiji's words or themes in Rikhia?

Everybody should try to understand what Sri Swamiji says from their own perspective. I would not classify anything Sri Swamiji says as being a universal statement, applicable to everyone, because it is not. Everybody interprets what he says differently according to their level. I may have personal problems, so I pick up what is relevant for my spiritual life. I may be a true seeker so I pick up what is relevant for that. We have to understand what he says from our own perspective, and to live it according to our level.

Some people have totally rejected what Sri Swamiji has said. If you cannot agree with his views it is because you are not trying to understand from that perspective, and even if he tries to answer you, you will not be able to understand. You have to understand what was there for you to understand. You will not be able to understand anything beyond that.

What is fear? How does it evolve?

Fear is an instinct and instinct will always express itself, no matter how much you try to change. Instinct is an aspect of your nature or *swabhava*, just as smell is an attribute of the nose, taste of the tongue, and sight of the eyes. Can you explain vision? Can you explain or define smell? If there is no nose, there is no smell. If there are no eyes, there is no sight. If there is no tongue, there is no taste. If there is no nature, there is no fear, no craving, no passion and no sleep: no *bhaya*, *ahara*, *maithuna* and *nidra*.

Fear, craving, passion and the desire to shut down are the inherent aspects of our nature, which express themselves differently according to our growth, understanding, logic, rationality, intellect, emotion, feeling, desire, ambition and ego. Situations, desires and sensorial conditions influence the expression of instincts. Instincts are just there, there is no need to define them. Only those who are unable to understand the basic ABC try to classify them; however, their classification is incomplete, because ideas and concepts may change one or two months, one year or one lifetime down the line.

For a primitive person, the concept of fear was different than it is today. In the middle ages, it was also different. In the future, the concept will again be different. Just as one's nature evolves, so will the instincts, because they are part of that nature. You will never be rid of fear. Even though you may become a luminous being, fear, passion and cravings will continue to exist. Their expression and the direction they take may be different, they will definitely have evolved, but they will still be there in a different form.

To understand the reactions to fear and passion, yoga has suggested the practice of pratyahara. In order to understand craving, whether it be for money, name, status or recognition, yoga has given the practices of pratyahara. In order to understand the process of shutting the mind off from external inputs, yoga has defined the practices of pratyahara. Therefore, practise pratyahara and hopefully you will be able to understand the fear that you are experiencing. Analyze it. See how it affects your behaviour, expressions, creativity, mental clarity and direction in life, and try to manage that negative aspect.

Do not imagine that there will ever be total absence of fear. No, something will always be lurking in the deepest remote corner of your nature, and when the time is right, it will come up, just as in some countries the snow which covers the ground for most of the year melts and you see the green come up. In the same way the nature, the swabhava which contains the rajasic, tamasic and sattwic gunas, can be altered and changed, it is not eradicated.

I have been studying kundalini yoga because I thought it to be the most important practice for the spiritual aspirant, but since I visited Sri Swamiji I feel the focus of my path should become more selfless-service orientated. What are your views on Sri Swamiji's change of focus? Should we as disciples start to change our focus also?

Do not be a copycat. You cannot be Sri Swamiji; if you had that ability you would not need to be here. What you see in

the life of Sri Swamiji is a natural transition from one stage of life into another, not a desired or self-imposed one. That transition can only happen when you have renounced your karmas and desires, and surrendered yourself to the divine will. If you can do that, then you can change your focus, but for us the stepping-stone is yoga, and the change will only come about when we have perfected yoga.

There are some people who will only go a certain distance even with kundalini yoga. Although we teach kriya yoga and kundalini yoga to many people and they have many different psychic experiences, out of those, maybe one or two will be able to awaken the kundalini, and they are not participating in the classes. You have to understand human psychology. There is no use saying that kundalini yoga or kriya yoga is good. There is no use saying that service and devotion are good, or that you feel attracted to this or that path. You can only decide what is good for you if you know yourself, otherwise do not decide for yourself.

As far as focus goes, Sri Swamiji's focus is different; it cannot be my focus or your focus, because we have not come to that stage. Let us say we are still in Munger and he is sitting in Calcutta. He has taken the journey from Munger to Calcutta already, and he is ready to board another train to another destination, but we have still to make the journey from Munger to Calcutta. Some of us have gone as far as Jamalpur station, and are waiting for the train. For some people the train is stuck out in the wilderness, as always happens in India, not a single soul, not a single bird or building, the train has stopped in the deep woods. For others the train has stopped in some unknown station. But the journey has to continue, and the train which takes you from Munger to Calcutta is only one. The train which takes you to another destination, beyond Calcutta, is dedication and *bhakti*, belief and faith.

If you want to change your focus, it is up to you, but I can assure you that you are going to fail, because you have not yet perfected the basics for deciding your focus. For us

at present, the focus has to be yoga, improvement of our personality and nature. In the course of time, as we change, our focus will change also, but it is actually something that we will not be able to stop.

We see many beautiful things expressed, lived and taught by other people, and they can be an inspiration to us; however, we have to begin from where we are. I cannot become Sri Swamiji. No, I will always remain Niranjanananda. You cannot become Sri Swamiji, nor can you become Niranjanananda, just as somebody else cannot become you.

Please understand that you have a particular mentality; you have your own strengths and weaknesses, your own ambitions and needs. Manage them! If you can learn to manage them, you will experience harmony, stability and peace, the three requirements for progressing on the spiritual path. Sri Swamiji has said many times, “I am not responsible for my karmas anymore.” Of course, any one of us can say that also. We can give somebody a slap and say, “I am not responsible for that slap.” There is the law of cause and effect, however. We think of karma as action, but karma is not action, karma is the potential inherent in every action.

Earth has the potential to take any form. It can become a pot or a building or anything you make out of it. The potential is inherent in the earth. Similarly, in every thought we think, in every ambition we have, in every attitude we adopt, there is an inherent effect, and nobody is free from that. If I think ill of somebody, I am accumulating karma of that thought. It is not necessary to act; I am accumulating karma by thinking. If I desire something, whether it is a selfish or unselfish desire, I still accumulate karma, because effect is inherent in desire. Effect is inherent in thought. Effect is inherent in action. Effect is inherent in creation. We are all subject to karma, and in order to become free from the effects of karma and to live a life of joy, happiness, peace and bliss, we need to perfect yoga.

What is the use of practising kundalini yoga if I am wretched and crooked in my attitude and behaviour? I must first perfect the yamas and niyamas. If that basic change has not taken place in my behaviour, personality and attitude, what will I gain by awakening my kundalini? I will just become more gross, more earthly and material. Therefore, the system of yoga has been devised; progressions and sequences have been defined to help us realize ourselves. Only after we have realized ourselves can a new destiny and direction unfold before us, and that becomes our next focus.

Sri Swamiji and you have stressed the significance of marriage. Considering the fragility of human relationships, particularly the sexual relationships, how can one restore his or her confidence in the institution of marriage?

We have made marriage into an institution; however, the great thinkers have not seen marriage as an institution. If marriage can be called an institution today, then let us also call birth and death institutions. Due to the distance from our true nature, from our spirit, we are unable to see the beauty and necessity of an inner support which can nurture us and make us grow.

The proper concept of marriage is the union of two spirits, not two physical bodies. It is the union of Purusha and Prakriti. The point of view of the thinkers, rishis, sages and seekers is that marriage is an important aspect of one's life in which both the hardness and softness of nature are realized.

Sri Swamiji has spoken a lot on this subject. It does not mean that he is wishing to institutionalize marriage, or saying that marriage is a must for everybody. He is simply trying to make us aware that, although the social process of marriage is there, instead of looking at it as a means of sensual and sexual satisfaction, as a way of satisfying one's passions, we should look at the spiritual dimension of it. By looking at the spiritual dimension of this ceremony or ritual, and understanding the importance of the two spirits

coming together to form a complete whole, one can lead a tantric life, in which energy is liberated and consciousness is expanded.

Please do not misunderstand from this that we are advocating marriage. Sri Swamiji is simply trying to give an insight into the concept of marriage as a union between Purusha and Prakriti on a higher dimension. If we think in social terms about marriage, then every culture and civilization expresses the need and necessity of marriage in a different way. It changes in every age, in every environment, civilization and country. Who is to say, "This social system is correct and this is incorrect"? It is not our duty to say one thing is correct and another is incorrect, as the landscapes continue to change. What we want to emphasize is the idea of accepting a support which is spiritual in nature.

Why do marriages fail in society today? It is because we look at everything through the eyes of passion, because our goals are different, we simply see who is beautiful, who we like, and that is all. I remember very clearly when somebody asked Sri Swamiji once, "How can one lead an ideal family life?" He said everybody must share the same goal, the same inspiration. If in a family, the husband and wife have the same goal and inspiration, there will not be any split; however, if everyone's goal is different, how long will the bond of sensuality hold them together? It will not hold them at all. The bond of sensuality, sexuality and passion is a very flimsy one. The bond will exist only while you need these things, and when you no longer need them, the bond will dissolve, and there will be a split. You will begin to look at somebody else, and so the story goes on.

It is our misunderstanding of the life process which has led to the breakdown of our emotional, rational and spiritual systems. These three areas are fulfilled at a very high level with the union of Purusha and Prakriti. When this happens at the material level there will be a very beautiful interaction of love, affection and joy between wife and husband. At

the mental level there will be understanding, trust, belief and faith in each other. At the emotional level there will be a sense of fulfilment and happiness, not obsession and possessiveness. At the spiritual level there will be a feeling of oneness. That is what Sri Swamiji has been talking about, not about the institution of marriage.

In terms of the guru-disciple relationship, does surrender mean giving up the responsibility of one's own life thereafter? Could you please explain surrender?

Surrender has to be understood from a different perspective. When you talk of giving up responsibilities you are thinking in terms of your social life, and giving up the responsibilities of social life is not surrender. Surrender has nothing to do with our social, mental, emotional or personal life. It is related to spiritual life, and this is where people confuse the idea of surrender. Different teachers have emphasized the need for surrender. I have known many people who have said that you need to surrender all your wealth, property and family in order to be free to progress in your spiritual life. I do not agree with that. I find that brand of mentality a manipulative one which wants to amass wealth and power and gain control over other people. We do not speak of this in the yogic tradition, Sivananda tradition or Satyananda tradition, nor shall we speak like this in the Niranjanananda tradition.

What do you need to surrender? As surrender deals with your spiritual identity, the first thing you have to do is surrender the ego and become innocent. If surrender represents the culmination of spiritual awakening, then what you need to do is surrender your eccentricities of mind and develop discrimination, dispassion and creativity. If you need to surrender anything, then surrender your selfishness. That is the true meaning of the word surrender.

The social concept of surrender is not a spiritual concept, though it can be considered as an institutional concept. Previously, in the sannyasa tradition people used

to come to the guru's home and renounce whatever they had: clothes, money or other possessions. That renunciation was not surrender, it was a symbolic renunciation, "Okay, I have let go of my attachments and now you look after me." The guru would then provide them with clothes, food and finances to make journeys here and there, and look after their security and comfort. Out of this kind of renunciation a community evolved which was known as *gurukul* or the family of the guru.

Over time, laws, necessities and people's inclinations have changed, thus from a social point of view, renunciation does not mean anything today. In fact, one of the rules which I created in this ashram after discussion with Sri Swamiji was that when people come here, whatever money they have, they should put in a bank account in their name, and the institution will not touch it, it is theirs. This applies more to the female sannyasins. When parents come to me and say, "Look, my girl, daughter, wife or sister wants to stay here as a sannyasin", I say, "Fine, she can stay, but before we accept her, you first put fifty thousand rupees in the bank in her name in a fixed term-deposit. That will be her security. After six months, if she does not want to remain here, she has some support." So where is the question of renouncing all your wealth?

The concept of surrender is to surrender one's ego, idiosyncrasies and selfishness in order to be in tune with the inspiration that one receives from the guru and the divine. Surrendering means becoming innocent not crooked. In the world you can be crooked, but in front of God and guru, be innocent. That is real surrender.

How can householders practise self-observation?

Self-observation is based on sadhana, and sadhana can be perfected in an ashram environment. You can create your own ashram. Make a small hut and use it only for sadhana purposes. The vibration and environment will change. You can go through your head-trips in the house, but when you

go to your hut, leave your head-trips outside and go there with the attitude of sadhana. In that way you will be able to build up a proper vibration. Ashrams are not difficult places to create, they are very simple. A one-hut ashram is very easy to make, and we are hoping that in the coming years, we will be able to create an ashram for everybody. Not here of course, because Bihar Yoga Bharati has taken over now.

Why is there frustration everywhere in life? Does frustration also produce anger? What is the remedy?

The answer to this question has been given in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:62–63): “When you focus on objects which give pleasure there is a natural attraction and attachment to them. This attraction to objects of pleasure creates obsession, and unfulfilled obsession creates anger. Anger creates delusion, and delusion destroys mental clarity. With the destruction of mental clarity, logic and rationality disappear, and with the disappearance of rationality life becomes meaningless.”

If you analyze this sequence which has been given in the *Bhagavad Gita*, you will find it to be very correct. All our life we are dealing with our desires. Desires are not bad; they are the spice of life. Just as salt is necessary in food to give it taste, in life one has to have desire to add some flavour.

Desires are the spice of life, and desires are eternal. It is only the object of desire which keeps on changing, with the progress of civilization. One thousand years ago the maximum desire was to own a donkey. That was the status symbol. In the time of Christ and earlier, the donkey was a very valuable animal. Later on this changed, as new objects of desire came with the progress of science and civilization. Today our desires are for cars, TVs and computers. In the past our desires were limited, because there were not many objects of attraction. I mean, how many donkeys could you be attracted to? However, we can be attracted to many different styles of good cars and the latest gadgets which have been created to provide us with some form of joy and happiness or favourable status.

Today we go to other countries; tomorrow our children will be going to other planets! Desires will always be there and there is no use denying them, because one cannot remain free from desires. No. Buddha used to say, "If you want to attain enlightenment, you have to give up the desire to become enlightened." There has to come a point where you say, "Okay, enough of desires", and start living life as it is.

When we find something pleasant, we get attached to it and want to possess it. That attachment then takes deep root in our mind and becomes a form of obsession. It is good to have a car, but if you start dreaming about cars every night, there is something wrong. It is good to have pizza and spaghetti, but if after six months in the ashram you start dreaming about pizza and spaghetti every day, there is something wrong.

Obsession leads to delusion. Delusion leads to loss of mental clarity. Loss of mental clarity leads to loss of rationality or *viveka*, the faculty of discrimination and of logic. Once discrimination is gone and you are not able to say what is right and what is wrong, to differentiate between the real and the unreal, the temporary and the permanent, then life loses its meaning totally. You become directionless like a zombie, a ship without a rudder, at the whim of the waves. Sometimes the waves come from one side and you feel happy, elated and joyous. At other times they hit you from the other side and you feel depressed and frustrated. The remedy to overcome this frustration is to reverse the process, which is described in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Therefore, observe the objects of attraction which hold and bind you, and you will be able to overcome frustrations. It is a lifelong process!

Detachment has to be understood in the right perspective. Detachment does not mean leaving something completely, it means not holding on to something. We get attached to many things, even a pen. If somebody who we hold in high esteem gives us a pen, naturally we will be attached to it.

One can have everything, but one should not think, “This is mine.” The idea of ‘my’ or ‘mine’ should be removed. When someone gives you a camera, tape recorder or TV and asks you to look after it while they are away, you keep it in your home and look after it for them. You take good care of it, but you are not attached to it because you know it does not belong to you. Similarly, this body, this life and this world are given to us on loan, they do not actually belong to us and if we start thinking, “This is mine”, in relation to any object, then there will be problems.

We have to have the philosophy, belief and conviction that the life we have received has only been given to us on loan in the form of a trust. We are just the custodians, it is our duty to preserve, protect, cherish, nurture and hold it. When our time comes to leave the world, then it is our duty to return it to the owner of the whole thing in a better condition than we received it.

The same thing applies to your mind. You received your mind with a combination of sattwa, rajas, and tamas. You should return it with sattwa only. You received a healthy body; do not return it in an unhealthy and sick condition. Return a healthy body. Similarly, do not destroy the world to get metal for wood, gold, this and that. Preserve it. Preserve nature and return it in a better condition than it came in originally.

If someone desires above all in their life to have spiritual union with their guru, will the guru undertake to help them attain this in spite of the disciple’s limitations?

No, people can desire many things, but the desire for union with the guru has to be mutual. The wish and will on the part of the disciple is irrelevant if it is not coming from the other side also. The desire and decision on the part of the disciple alone is not enough. The guru must also feel the same force, and experience the same desire. Only then can union with the guru’s energy be possible. Please remember that, in the spiritual realm, this is where the paradox comes in, for

personal desires have no meaning or validity. It has been stated by the masters and sages, that one of the milestones of spiritual life is reduction of desires. Buddha said, "In order to attain nirvana you have to give up the desire to attain nirvana." This has been emphasized many times by masters who have attained the transcendental or cosmic level, or whatever label you may want to give it.

In order for guru and disciple to have an intimate feeling for each other there has to be a very intense and deep level of understanding, which is not possible on the human level, because whenever we make someone our guru we project our own aspirations and ideas on to them. We expect the guru to conform to our ideas. As long as the guru conforms to our ideals, he is an 'all right' person, but the moment the guru expresses his or her human nature, we say, "How can it be possible for the guru to do that?" In fact, we make the guru into some kind of a robot who moves, walks and speaks with total perfection. Any hint of imperfection in our guru's nature, shatters our ideas and concepts. Thus, even our understanding of the relationship with the guru is incomplete. With that kind of mentality, how can we even conceive of identifying with the guru?

The relationship with the guru has to be without any kind of mask or superstition. There has to be acceptance, sincerity, understanding and connection. These are the things which can eventually lead you to a spiritual union with the guru's shakti. Therefore the guru-disciple relationship is not an easy relationship to define. When we talk about acceptance of the guru or surrendering to the guru, many people say, "But then we will lose our individuality!" That kind of statement comes from the surface of our ego. You want to climb to the sixth floor; yet you do not want to leave the ground. You want your kundalini to reach sahasrara, yet when kundalini awakens in mooladhara and you begin to enjoy life you say, "This is it", and you want to stay there.

There are many paradoxes in life, some of which are created by us, some which are created by our cultural,

religious and social education, and some which are naturally built into our personality. How can we overcome these conditionings? Just having the desire to overcome them is not enough. Desire has to be followed by action, and action always follows a lengthy process. Desires can be instantaneous, actions are never instantaneous. Take the simple act of eating food; I desire to have food. In order to have it, I have to perform a lengthy series of actions: go to the kitchen, turn on the cooker, open the packet, pour the contents into the boiling water, wait for it to boil; it is a lengthy process. It did not take more than one second to conjure up the desire, but it takes about an hour in the kitchen to make the food of your choice. It does not take long to conjure up the desire to go from Australia to India, but it takes fourteen hours of flying time and so many hours in the train and bus before you actually reach there.

If you wish to eliminate action from desire then desire has no function, no role to play; however, if you wish to fulfil a desire it is the action which is important. If one has a desire for spiritual union with the guru, then the process of how to go about it should be given more importance. The process involves developing a feeling of identification with, an understanding and acceptance of, and faith and trust in, not only the guru, but also in yourself. One should be comfortable during the whole process.

The disciple is raw material like a stone, rock, or piece of marble and the guru is the sculptor. When the guru begins to chisel away at us it hurts a lot, because he has to cut away the unnecessary parts of the stone in order to bring out a perfect form. If the stone begins to cry, "No, no, don't touch me, don't hurt me, don't cut me", then the sculptor will say, "This stone is unfit", and will throw away the stone. But if the stone allows the sculptor to do all the necessary carving, eventually it will become invaluable and reflect the creativity of the sculptor. This is the attitude a disciple must have in relation to his or her guru, and I have always maintained this attitude.

I feel myself to be a very lucky person indeed to have lived with Sri Swamiji and to have been guided, loved, supported and nurtured by him. At the same time, I have to remind myself every day, “I am ready for everything. He may use me, he may misuse me, and he may abuse me, no problem!” The guru will never follow the path of injustice. Sometimes the actions may be harsh, sure, but they will never follow the path of injustice. The guru always walks the path of dharma. The training may be difficult, but if there is no injustice or adharma in it, then why not accept it?

Are there any practices, actions or attitudes that can lead one to the state of innocence?

There are three paths, which lead to the state of innocence and we will look at them individually.

The first path is through the intellect, *jnana yoga*. It is said to be a difficult method. The belief of *jnana yoga* is that, as you develop and expand the horizon of your perception and rationality, the intellect will become simple. In the course of time it will lose its devious, distorted and dissipated nature and become simple and innocent. How can the *jnana yoga* process lead to innocence?

Jnana yoga is the application of personal realizations. It is not just something that we believe in, but something which we can apply in our life. This begins with self-study, “Who am I?” This enquiry is not in a physical context, but in the sense of what is my nature, what is my belief, how do I respond to other influences, ideas and thoughts? How is my personality affected, and how can I sublimate the limiting and restricting factors of my personality to experience the purity of self? This process can lead to innocence. That is path number one.

The second path is easier than *jnana yoga*. It is *karma yoga*. To practise *karma yoga* properly, there has to be a very high standard of surrender. To develop innocence, you have to hold the ideal of surrender in your mind. This ideal takes time to grow; however, if the actions become selfless, then it is possible to experience innocence.

The third path is that of bhakti, which is not just devotion. Bhakti is not just thinking of a pure and divine concept. In bhakti there are nine different steps. The first step is keeping the company of truthful people: *satsang*, *santana sanga*. The second step is *hari nama katha prasanga*, talking about God, understanding the different roles that God has played in creation, and the realization of those roles. The third step is to become egoless: I am not the doer, I am not the enjoyer, I am only an instrument which the divine plays in order to bring out the best melodies that are inherent within me. In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, “Make me an instrument of Thy peace.” Sri Rama has defined nine steps of bhakti in the *Ramayana* and a similar nine steps have been defined by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Both have stated that perfection of any one of the states of bhakti will lead to purity of self, or an innocent nature. Therefore, bhakti seems to be the easiest, safest and cheapest of the methods.

Jnana yoga is an involved and intricate process. Karma yoga is also difficult. So let us keep in mind bhakti yoga as the easier method by which to develop innocence.

Could you please explain what dharma and karma are?

Dharma is not dogma, belief, religion or Puritanism. It is not being good and doing good. It is not becoming sattwic or trying to change oneself. Dharma is an integral part of every individual, society, nation, culture and civilization. It is the nature of the whole cosmos.

In dharma there are three main aspects which nurture and sustain society. In the language of dharma, these aspects are *sat vichara*, auspicious thinking; *sat vyavahara*, auspicious behaviour; and *sat karma*, auspicious actions. *Sat* means truth, that which is beneficial, real and not false, perfection. If our thoughts, behaviour and actions have the component of sat in them, then that is dharma. In the absence of any of these three, the growth of individual consciousness does not take place.

If you want to make a tree into a bonsai, you make sure the roots are cut and the growth suppressed. If you keep on cutting the roots and suppressing the growth of a banyan tree, it will become a bonsai-banyan tree.

The roots which nurture and sustain life, which are responsible for the development and evolution of life, are sat vichara, thought with the component of satya, making it auspicious, sat vyavahara, behaviour with the component of satya, and sat karma, action with the component of satya. In the absence of one or two of these, our life does not grow. We become bonsai individuals, bonsai communities, societies, civilizations and cultures.

Karma is an integral part of dharma. I do not know why people weave different concepts and philosophies about karma. They talk about the law of cause and effect, but karma is not an independent action. Karma is always bound by dharma. Where there is karma there is also dharma, and where there is dharma, there is karma as well. People have separated the aspect of karma from dharma. Dharma has become a subject for reflection and contemplation, while karma has become a subject of involvement. Hence the confusion, in relation to what we desire and need, to our ties with family and friends, to our near and dear ones, to our profession and creativity, to our concept about right and wrong, just and unjust.

According to dharma you must gain the ability to manage and direct your own thoughts. A system has been created to educate ourselves on how to manage our thoughts, desires, beliefs and ambitions. In yoga, it takes the form of the structured sequence of yama, niyama and meditation techniques which allow for the gradual realization of the total mind, starting from the very basic techniques of pratyahara up to dhyana. Control of the mind leads to the clear direction of thought, rationality, and to a better understanding of one's inner nature. This begins to reflect in one's behaviour.

What are expressed in behaviour naturally are the inherent human qualities of love, compassion, affection and the yamas.

Life is guided by the principles of niyama like *shaucha*, purity of the environment, of the living area, no negative vibrations, not even negative thoughts, because thoughts are vibrations which can alter our immediate environment.

Life is guided by the principle of *santosha*, contentment, and the other niyamas and they become part of human behaviour. When the mind and personality are transformed, karma is not a cause and effect but an inherent part of dharma, which is beyond cause and effect.

We are very immature and behave like little kids in the way we express our own ego, nature and personality. It is hilarious to see the manner in which we behave, what our expectations and desires are and how we do or do not adjust to a given situation, to the environment. In the scale of dharma, our evolution, responses, behaviour and attitudes are like those of five-year-old kids, totally immature. Therefore, dharma can never be part of one's belief or philosophy.

Belief and philosophy are subject to your nature, but you are subject to the nature of dharma, and you cannot change that, straight and simple. We cannot conceive of dharma either in thought, behaviour or action because in our present state, we lack the component of satya.

We are too much caught up in what the 'I' wants. In this state, we aspire and strive to realize this 'I' which will lead us to an understanding of freedom. I am not saying having or realizing freedom, I am saying understanding freedom. Understanding freedom is more difficult than having freedom.

The aim has to be to understand freedom as it applies to us as individuals, and that is the aim of karma. In karma also there are various divisions. Karma is not just action, it has various classifications. One type of karma is known as *purushartha*, effort; another is *prayatna*, trial, a third is *seva*, service. One type of karma is known as *swarthapoorna*, karma orientated towards oneself, for one's own satisfaction and fulfilment, for taking the 'I' in the direction of tamas and rajas.

There are various classifications of karma. One is *samajic* or social karma, how you interact with other people, with the community, that creates a different kind of karma. There are quite a few different divisions of karma, and according to the performance of those karmas, the result inherent in them is obtained.

The result is not something which comes from outside; it is inherent in the karma itself. If I punch at the wall, what will the result be? My finger bones will break. The result is inherent in the karma, so cause and effect cannot be two separate things. When you talk of effect, you are talking of the inherent effect in the karma, not something which has separate identity. Therefore, there is no such thing as separate cause and separate effect. Cause is inherent in effect and effect is inherent in cause.

Different types of karmas have different causes and effects. Some of them are uplifting and transforming while others are binding and limiting. Different things happen at different times. Therefore, I say it is the understanding of the dharma, freedom and karma which is important in the transformation of one's life.

If one's life is transformed in the right way, then that is also mukti, nirvana, samadhi, self-realization or God-realization. Dharma is part of our life, just as air is part of it. We need it for survival, growth and development.

If, after realizing his true nature, a person wants to change from a tamasic or rajasic to a sattwic personality, what should he do?

If you have realized your true nature, then what are you going to change? You have already gone beyond tamas and rajas. The only time you have not realized your true nature is when you are tamasic or rajasic; however, if you have already realized it, then you do not have to think of anything further.

The three gunas are known as *sattwic*, the pure; *rajasic*, the dynamic; and *tamasic*, the static. The yogis realized another

state, beyond the three gunas which is known as *trigunatitha*, the state of transcendence, beyond the three gunas.

You cannot conceive of your true nature as being subject to *tamas*, *rajas* or *sattwa*. *Sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas* all have their own area of experience. If we are within the confines of the *tamasic*, *rajasic* or *sattwic* dimension, then that particular *guna* will be predominant within us, and we would not be able to know our true nature. You have to understand very clearly that our effort is to move from the predominant *guna* towards the more subtle one.

If *tamoguna* is predominant in me, then my yogic *sadhana* has to lead me towards the purification of *tamoguna* and the transition into *rajoguna*, then towards purification of *rajoguna*, and the transition into *sattwaguna*, and finally towards the purification of *sattwaguna* and transition into the transcendental. If I am by nature *sattwic*, then my yogic *sadhana* has to lead me towards the pure, the transcendental.

The real nature has been described by the yogis as *sat*, truth. *Tamoguna*, *rajoguna* and *sattwaguna* cannot be the ultimate truth because of their limitations. *Sat turiyatita* can be defined as truth beyond the three gunas, *chit*, total consciousness as pervasive as space; *ananda*, bliss; joy, happiness, contentment, fulfilment. It has also been described as *satyam*, another word for truth; *shivam*, the auspicious nature; and *sundaram*, the underlying beauty in everything. It is known traditionally as *Brahman*, the evolving, the all-pervasive consciousness in its manifest, causal and transcendental aspect.

How can we accept God's will even though it is sometimes against our will?

If it is against your will, then why do you even bother about God's will? You cannot follow both your will and God's will. You cannot have your cake and eat it too.

There is no difference between your will and God's will to begin with. There is only the covering of ego, the 'I' identity. Due to the predominant nature of the 'I' identity,

you think, “This is my will” and “That is God’s will.” When you are in a rajasic or dominant mood, then it seems to be your will. When you are in a sattwic or peaceful mood, then it is God’s will. When you are in a tamasic mood, there is no will, nothing. Frankly speaking, this is the only difference between your will and God’s will.

Naturally, we then try to analyze it from our perspective by saying, “I have a nature, I have a personality, I have my needs, I live in a situation, in an environment.’ We create a reason to confirm the guna which is predominant in us and to give logic to our will. This confirmation and this logic also come from the same guna.

Imagine you are angry with somebody for having said or done something to you, then you try to project yourself as a strong person and after that you try to dominate the other person with your presence, attitude, thoughts or ideas. What are you projecting? You are projecting your rajoguna quality. When you are at peace with yourself, what are you projecting? What are you radiating? You are radiating the sattwaguna quality. When you are at peace with yourself, you will realize that there is no difference between your will and God’s will, because you do not exist as an identity. The barrier of ego is removed.

Only when the ego has to assert itself does it become ‘my will’, but when the ego is at peace with itself, it is God’s will. You can think about it, you can analyze it, but this is the reality.

What is the basis of the guru-disciple relationship? What makes a swami a swami?

The guru is the illuminator, the one who can make us aware of a different reality experienced by buddhi, mind, emotions and spirit. The reality which we are experiencing now is through the senses, and through *buddhi* or intellect. Yoga has defined these two as the *karmendriyas* and *jnanendriyas*. The *karmendriyas* are the physical senses, organs. The *jnanendriyas* are the organs of buddhi, also known as *buddhendriyas*.

When we live in the world governed by the senses, the total potential of human nature is never experienced. If you live in a house with ten rooms, you can pass your life wandering through it and enjoy it, but you never give yourself the opportunity of going out of the house into the world, seeing nature and coming back into the same house with awareness, wisdom, and knowledge of how other people live. This is what happens with our life. We live inside the house.

The guru can be called a tour guide who says, “Look, get out of your house, see the countryside, enjoy the clean, the fresh, the beautiful, spend some time there, reviving your nature, reviving yourself. Then go back and live happily in your house.” A person who takes us out of our limited condition is known as the guru. This is a very simple definition of guru; there is nothing difficult, spiritual or transcendental about it. Discipleship is not studentship.

A student is what we are as long as we do not imbibe the teaching. When we imbibe the teaching and live that teaching, when our actions and thoughts reflect each other without contradiction, that state of harmony, of living and implementing the teaching, is discipleship. When the disciple has this level of feeling, trust, faith, belief and connection with the guru, the relationship develops into something very beautiful, positive and nurturing. If we want to mould our guru as per our own thoughts and ideas, then that type of relationship is bound to fail, no matter how hard we try. The disciple has to accept the guru in total as he or she is. The guru may be a drunkard, but the disciple should accept it and not question it! The guru may be a drug addict, accept it and do not question it! The guru may be a playboy, accept it and do not question it!

You should read the life story of Milarepa, one of the greatest Tibetan saints. It is a very beautiful and inspiring life story, especially in relation to his guru, who was a very great tantric. Milarepa went to him, to become his disciple and learn the art of tantra. The guru said, “Look, before I give you any teaching, you have to build me a house on

top of this rocky mountain by carrying these large boulders from the bottom of the hill to the top. Milarepa agreed and made the house on top of the rocky mountain, carrying each boulder alone, one by one. When the house was complete, the guru said, “No, I don’t like the location of it. I think the bottom of the hill would be more suitable. Dismantle it stone by stone. Take the boulders down and make the house there.” Milarepa made the house. Again, the guru said, “No, the trees may fall on it; anything may happen. This is not a good location.” Again, he had to rebuild it. Seven times Milarepa built the house, dismantled it and built it again.

Imagine how many years it would have taken, at least one whole season, and Milarepa had to do it seven times! For so many years he did nothing but this. One day while he was shifting the rocks the guru was walking by on top of the mountain and saw Milarepa taking a short rest. He yelled, “You lazy boy!” and gave him a hard kick, “Can’t you work faster?” Milarepa had already become very weak from carrying the rocks up and down the mountain. He fell down a very deep ravine and while he was falling, the only thought and image in his mind was that of the guru. Just before he crashed to the ground a hand appeared from nowhere, and lifted Milarepa up again in front of the guru who said to Milarepa, “Now you have learned everything.”

What would the outcome be if you had been in the place of Milarepa? You would walk out! Nobody would tolerate it. You always try to mould the guru into your image, and that kind of relationship never amounts to anything. You may live in close proximity to the guru your whole life, ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, but if the faith and trust, the communication and personal connection does not exist, then it amounts to nothing. You will remain what you were before. The only difference will be that you will have aged so many years.

This connection happens on two different levels. One is in relation to the *sannyasin* and the other is in relation to the person with responsibility, what we call householder or *grihasta*. The *grihasta* can develop a very deep connection

with the guru, which makes them confident and optimistic for the future, and brings a feeling of joy and happiness into their lives. There is a looking-forwardness, if I may use the word, to further contact and communication with the guru. When this connection comes about in the life of a sannyasin they become a swami, not before. Even though one may be in geru, even though one may be a poorna sannyasin, that will amount to nothing if your feelings are not directed or channelled towards the guru. Through your own nature, personality, performance and ability, you can become one with the guru.

How do we tackle boredom and the cloud of delusion?

The cloud of delusion is known as maya. It is recognized as avidya. Sometimes the force of maya and avidya is very strong, sometimes it is weak. Sometimes we are able to see the light of truth, sometimes even living surrounded by truth, we only see untruth.

Boredom is something else. Boredom is loss of control over the physical and mental senses and states. People say, "I am not motivated." People say, "I can't adjust." People say, "I don't have any inspiration and energy." What is the meaning of all these different types of sentences? What does, "I can't adjust" mean? It means you have a certain perspective and the reality in which you are living is different from your perspective, and therefore you cannot adjust. When there is rejection of reality, when there is no understanding of what we want, then boredom sets in.

How and why do you lose and gain motivation? Motivation represents a creative state of mind, always looking ahead, aspiring, striving to do better and better, and enjoying it, expressing yourself in it, no matter what the situation may be. A clerk whose job it is to maintain the archive can experience this feeling of happiness in his work. A cook can maintain this feeling of happiness while working in the kitchen. The farmer on the farm, pushing the bullock ahead of him, can also have that sense of happiness. A telephone operator, who sits in the exchange just pulling and

pushing the cords, can experience this sense of fulfilment and contentment. Many have this sense of fulfilment because they identify with their work.

In life, in society, in institutions we see different natures. If we consider everything to be an organization, then one can say there are some people who join the organization only for the ride.

Boredom and lack of motivation represent a negative perspective of the world around us, and our inability to change that perspective into something nice, positive, creative and beautiful. Boredom is the loss of this ability. The cloud of delusion or maya, the experience of avidya is a different thing.

Humility is said to be good and if we try to be sincere and honest, why is it that sincere and honest people always suffer, either physically or emotionally?

Humility complements some other quality which may or may not be positive. It is one thing to talk about qualities like humility, sincerity and honesty, and another thing to live them.

Spiritual masters and even philosophers have said that putting something into action is more important than speculating about something of which there can never be any definite understanding or realization. For example, one cannot give an image to the omnipresent God, just as one cannot claim to be cleverer than God who is omniscient. However, we can follow the system, the process of self-observation in order to discover the expressive nature of our personality. We should not classify things as good and bad; right and wrong do not exist. They are only labels that we give to our competence and incompetence, to our ability and inability, to our desire for action and inaction, to express our dynamism and our lethargy, which are the natural outcome of the combination of the three gunas.

If you are tamasic by nature you are bound to be lethargic, jealous, greedy, and even arrogant with a superiority complex.

You can be a rajasic person. If you are rajasic, your actions will be domineering, outgoing, expressive vocally and emotionally. If you are sattvic, it will reflect in your behaviour. If we live according to the compulsion of the gunas, then even a mad thought which may come to our mind, is due to the compulsion of the gunas. Whether you love somebody is due to the compulsion of your predominant guna.

Through the observation of the personality, and trying to understand what kind of behaviour we express, we can become aware of many factors which have limited the expression of the good qualities in life. Whatever good we express is always in relation to ourselves, because of our need to possess, to have for our contentment, for our security, satisfaction or enjoyment. 'My' is always predominating, and 'my' has always represented an orientation towards the personal self. The process of self-observation will help you to see life from a different angle, a clearer, joyful, and definitely more innocent perspective.

For every positive quality there is a corresponding negative one. For every negative quality there is also a complementary, uplifting quality, and by realizing what our negative and uplifting qualities are, we find the balance in life.

Having this balance is more important than trying to be honest, humble and sincere. The qualities of honesty, simplicity, sincerity are only the expressions of a balanced nature, of a balanced personality.

It is only through sadhana, meditation, introspection, japa, mantra, and symbols of awareness that you can stimulate areas of the mind, areas of feelings and emotions, of logic and intelligence, performance, behaviour and attitude. This understanding of yourself will then lead you on to where you can express the beauty and the fullest aspects of life.

Our body, mind and entire personality are guided by habits, and when these habits take root in us, they become part of our nature. The senses, intellect, emotions, and all the different expressions of our personality are actually habits. The senses and mind become conditioned, and this

conditioning becomes our nature. If you want to overcome your nature, you have to create a better habit which is more creative and positive. Do not try to struggle with your nature. Normally we try to struggle with our nature, and that is where we fail. If we can make an attempt to form new habits and a better, positive conditioning which can develop and harmonize our mental and sensorial expression, it is a better solution.

If somebody who likes to sleep wants to get up early in the morning, they have to struggle. If instead of struggling, they can try to slowly build up the new habit by getting up at 5.45 am, then 5.30 am, after some more time, 5.15 am, then 5 am, until they get to 4 am, it is a smoother way than saying, "Starting tomorrow I'm going to get up at four o'clock every day, come thunder, rain or storm!" That is not going to work. Maybe you can do it for a week or two but after that, lethargy will set in. You cannot change your nature unless you have very strong willpower.

Is our belief based on experience, reality or hearsay?

Those people who say, "I believe in God", or, "I do not believe in God", are going through mental and intellectual gymnastics, nothing more. What do you believe in and what do you not believe in? We know we have a body, because we have the experience of a body. We know we have a mind, because we have experience of the mind. We know we have a spirit. Nobody has seen the spirit, but it is because of the spirit that we are here today. If the spirit were to leave us, then we would not exist. The reality and the ultimate experience is that God exists, just as the body, mind and spirit exist. Spirit is the limited experience whereas God is the infinite or cosmic experience. Therefore, the question of being a non-believer does not arise, because in reality nobody can be a non-believer. In reality everybody is a part, an extension, of the same spirit.

The philosophy of Buddha has been labelled, the philosophy which does not believe in the existence of God.

Similar to Buddha there were many others like Mahavir, who did not talk of God. One thing we have to remember is that these people are renunciates, tyagis, sannnyasins, and sannnyasins in the depth of their heart are always believers. It is our choice whether we talk about that higher reality or not. Buddha and Mahavir chose not to talk about God, because if they had started talking about God, many difficult questions and concepts would have cropped up, and the level of understanding of the people then was different. Their mentality was not one which could understand the concept of the godly nature. Also, when people like Buddha and Mahavir lived, the social environment was different, so they chose not to talk about the concept of God. Rather they gave people a practical understanding of how to attain *mukti*, liberation, from the different bondages of the world.

Ultimately, where do you go after attaining mukti or nirvana? The pain and sufferings cease. They stop. After that, what is the experience of nirvana? What is the experience of moksha? What is the experience of samadhi? What is the concept of eternal bliss, *ananda*? Are these concepts of samadhi, nirvana, moksha or eternal bliss different from the experience of the godly nature? They cannot be different. The language used was different; however, it led in the same direction.

Our philosophies can be labelled XYZ, the label is according to our intellectual understanding, and that intellectual understanding is not based on the experience of reality. It is a concept and belief. God, fate and destiny, these are mysteries which have to remain mysterious. There is no use in trying to explain them.

What is the difference between Yoga Philosophy, Yoga Psychology and Applied Yoga? What is the ultimate purpose of these departments?

Our society has had different needs at different times. Thirty years ago people came to yoga with a spiritual aim in mind. Some came with the idea of living with Sri Swamiji

as sannyasins, following his principles or path or mandates. That was the mentality with which I grew up. In the seventies there was a change of mentality as yoga was accepted more and more by the scientific community. Yoga was seen as a means of removing physical and psychological imbalances and diseases. As spiritual people, you know yoga to be a spiritual science, but what is it to those who are not so spiritual? Scientists and intellectuals started studying and investigating yoga. Doctors started experimenting with different techniques of asana and pranayama, and found that it was beneficial in the management of illness and disease.

In the seventies, the need was for therapy and people started coming to yoga more for therapy than for spiritual reasons. In the eighties there was another shift. People started coming not only for therapy, but also to become teachers of yoga and to make yoga their profession. Yoga became the profession of many people who taught yoga as exercise, as acrobatics, who taught yoga for health, for managing stress and tension. Yoga became a profession. But the physical and therapeutic aspects of yoga became a profession, not the real yoga.

In the nineties there was another shift. Although there was a big section in society who were happy with the normal, common practices of yoga, at the same time there was another section who wanted to study yoga in depth. A need developed for an institution where the entire subject of yoga could be studied in a yogic environment, where one could go deep into the subject and become the master of the subject. This was felt very strongly during the World Yoga Convention in 1993. The Governor of Bihar first made this idea public. He said that instead of calling the centre Bihar School of Yoga we could call it Bihar Yoga University, because it is a university where yogic life, yogic principles and the entire subject of yoga can be learnt by those who have the capacity to do this.

The idea that this had to be the next growth in the field of yoga was only in the minds of a few of us at that time. In which direction should we look, how can yoga be taken as a

subject of study in life and not just as a pastime or a hobby? Then the idea became public, and Bihar Yoga Bharati was formed as an extension of Bihar School of Yoga. Both these institutions are extensions of Sri Swamiji's yogic mission, which is to know yoga and to live yoga with proper discipline and with proper *maryada*. *Maryada* means living a righteous, balanced and harmonious lifestyle, without deviation.

When we thought of making this conversion to a yogic university the physical location of Ganga Darshan, there was definitely a feeling that this establishment has to be different from others. Although it would become an academic institution, there had to be a feeling for, an understanding of yoga which is non-academic too. But how do you imbibe that non-academic study or concept of yoga? We do this by trying to live in a certain pattern. This is going to help in the future too because the lifestyle in society is changing very rapidly, and this Kali Yuga is the age of money and finance. Why do people make yoga a profession? Why do so many people try to become yoga teachers all of a sudden? Why not fifty years ago? Why not thirty years ago? It is the social values; lifestyle, attractions, interactions and mentality were different. Today this path has changed.

The concept of Bihar Yoga Bharati (BYB) is a place where yoga could be learned in depth and also lived at the same time. The name Bihar Yoga can even be described as a sect of yoga in the sense that it is a philosophy of yoga. How many different schools are there in Vaishnavism? How many different schools are there in Shaivism? Kashmir Shaivism is an aspect of Shaivism which evolved in Kashmir. The paramguru of Adi Shankaracharya, Gaudapad, belonged to a place called Gauda, in Bengal. In this way if you look in the books you will find many such clarifications which identify the specific location where that philosophy developed. The school is named after the place where the idea evolved. Therefore, Bihar Yoga represents a place from where an idea is evolving, Bihar Yoga University.

The practical aspect of yoga can only be lived in an ashram environment, where it becomes a part of you twenty-

four hours a day. When you go home you will practise it for one, two or three hours. Your attention will be diverted here, there and everywhere, you won't be focused. The priorities become different, so it becomes difficult to manage and properly incorporate the principles as well as the practices of yoga. I think most people have had that experience: how to incorporate the principles and practices of yoga in a householder, family environment.

In the ashram environment, a feeling naturally comes which is based on the principle of observation. I have noticed that in ashrams people become very self-conscious. Being self-conscious is also an indication of being self-aware, which is good. Being conscious is good also, but being obsessed by it is not. If you are conscious, if you are aware of what is there, then you can always try to manage it. If you become obsessed by it then you might as well spend your time outside, for you have nothing to learn. An ashram has to be a place of learning, and living that learning to the best of one's ability, not that your philosophy and lifestyle are different.

I believe that yoga can only be perfected in an ashram environment. After perfection one should go out and live a life which is natural and spontaneous. Don't worry about other people's opinions. If you start to be influenced by other people's opinions then you will have no salvation.

In an ashram one becomes self-aware, self-conscious, and that self-consciousness can lead to either a feeling of guilt or a feeling of freedom. If it goes towards guilt it becomes self-obsession and self-indulgence, and if it goes towards freedom then it becomes yoga.

Recently, I decided not to wear a kurta or T-shirt any more unless the occasion demanded it. This was an external act. However, after some time I noticed that a change had taken place in my attitude and behaviour. I was feeling much lighter and happier. It had to be due to something deeper than a physical desire or a sankalpa not to wear a kurta or a T-shirt. I started analyzing and suddenly it hit me. Previously I was shy about openly exposing my body, because I was self-

conscious about other people's opinions about my being thin. My attitude changed. I wasn't suffering any more; I wasn't being influenced by other people's opinions any more. I was happy with myself. The physical act of dropping a kurta represented that transformation deep in my nature; there was a connection between the change in my behaviour and the act of dropping the kurta.

I try to live within the ashram discipline, following the structure and principles of yoga. Many things like this have happened and such changes I attribute both to yoga and the ashram. Therefore, I believe that yoga can be perfected in an ashram, and then lived outside. The change that has freed me is a very positive one. I'm sure that many of you have had certain experiences with which you could correct your nature. *Buddhi*, intellect, is not the final one; *jnana*, wisdom, has to follow *buddhi*. Just knowing about something is not the ultimate, but living it is.

Yoga is definitely physical, mental and spiritual; these are the three recognized aspects of yoga. These three recognized aspects of yoga were given three definite areas to develop and evolve, which became the three faculties. Yoga Philosophy represents the spiritual aspect of yoga, Yoga Psychology represents the mental aspect, and Applied Yoga represents the physical. These are the three dimensions of yoga which we are looking at and trying to develop, as it is when yoga is practised in the right atmosphere.

Yoga philosophy is the spiritual side of yoga, not just the concept that yoga is the union of *atma*, individual soul, and *paramatma*, the soul of higher consciousness. However, what is the process, what is the method behind that process, what kind of vision does it convey? That is yoga philosophy, which has the potential to become part of your life, thus becoming life. A yogic lifestyle can also be identified as a separate subject in Yoga Philosophy. Philosophy and lifestyle, at least in Eastern thought, have always gone together. They are not ideas alien to the practical nature of the person. The thoughts and beliefs of every individual should be harmonized with performance

in action. Turn the other cheek, but also be ready to give the other person a good whack if the occasion demands it. Wisdom is to know when to turn the other cheek and when to hit. Once you have it, you live that, and you're fine.

Yoga Psychology is where the true yoga lies because, according to the propagators of yoga, yoga is a science of mind. It deals with the balance and growth of the total mind, manas, buddhi, chitta, and ahamkhara. All the different altered states of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkhara are known as the vrittis. Something in which you believe at a given time is a vritti. These vrittis come up in all these four dimensions of the total mind.

This is the aspect of our nature which suffers, which identifies with the world of name, fame and idea. It is this mind which creates its own associations of good and bad, right and wrong, positive and negative, uplifting and detrimental. It is this mind which gets affected by raga and dwesha. It is this mind which obeys and is also rebellious. It is this mind which is also my friend and my foe. Because of the mental actions we always suffer from some kind of mental problem, agony, a feeling of vacuum, void, and different mental states such as anxiety, tension, anger, jealousy, depression, devotion, affection, believing, rejecting. It is the mind with its vrittis that controls, governs and runs our lives. If it can be made healthy, creative and balanced then the quality of life will change. Change your mind and you are changed; struggle with yourself then you are changed. Everybody is trying to struggle, there has to be a way of managing that struggle so that both my mind and I come up winners.

Then we have Applied Yoga, the physical application of yoga. Start with keeping the body healthy. A healthy body is a strong house, an infirm body is a weak house, which falls down whenever there is an earthquake or even a shudder or any vibration which knocks it. Applied Yoga begins with health, which begins with the proper utilization of the physical body, so that the body becomes the conductor of energy. This then links body, mind and spirit together.

These are the three departments with which we initially started BYB. Three more departments will be added later on. One will be a Department of Languages, beginning with Sanskrit, Pali and other scripts as well, to be able to do research into the ancient yogic texts. Another department will be Indological Studies. Just as the subject of yoga is being developed, we will also develop the understanding of different thought systems, and philosophical schools that have evolved in the Asian subcontinent. This department will eventually become a department of Studies on Ancient Cultures and Traditions. It will become a global faculty. The third department will be Ecology and Environmental Sciences, to preserve and protect nature, to care for the soil on the earth and environment in which we live. Thus, in the course of time all these different departments will function. It will be a very healthy combination of yoga, spiritual life and modern life.



Index

- Ambition 17, 60
Anger 206
Art of living 194
Ashram life 86, 130
Ashrams 70
Attachment 39
- Beauty 178
Belief 223
Bhagavad Gita 43, 92
Bhakti 57, 211
Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) 23, 70, 140
Bihar Yoga Bharati (BYB) 24, 140, 225
Boredom 220
Brahmacharya 67, 154
- Celibacy 188
Chakras 27, 38, 106, 144
Children 167
Communication 187
Consciousness 16
Cultural diversity 45
- Death and dying 19, 26, 192
Desire 206
Dharma 33, 182, 212
Discrimination 136
Disease 51
Diwali 176
- Drashta 43
Dwesha 40
- Earth, dimensions of
consciousness and 69
Ego 20, 181
Emotions 10
Evolution 108, 184
- Fear 198
Five pranas 41
Foetus, development of 63
- Ganesha 53, 55
God 110, 180, 190
God's will 216
Gopi Krishna 28
Granthis 161
Gudakesha 43
Gunas 157, 215
Guru 175; guru-disciple
relationship 85, 92, 149,
204, 208, 217
Guru Gita 159
Gurukul life 154, 166
- Health 51
Herbs, self-realization and 173
Householders 205
Humility 221

India, culture 39; poverty in 177; temples of 30
 Initiation 153
 Innocence 211
 International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM) 70
 Ishta devata 139

 Jnana yogi 87

 Karma 5, 61, 212
 Kirtan 118, 57, 160
 Kosha 92, 102, 123, 169
 Kundalini awakening 28

 Living yoga 113
 Love 61

 Maithuna sadhana 134
 Mantra 149, 161
 Marriage 115, 202
 Meditation 21; meditation asanas 91
 Mental balance 127
 Milarepa 217
 Music 160

 Nada yoga 120, 142, 197
 Nadis, ida and pingala 89
 Negative qualities, eradicating 84

 Om sadhana 8, 161

 Pain and suffering 92, 94
 Parenting 148
 Prana vayu 41
 Prana vidya 43, 148
 Pranic imbalances 102
 Psychic symbol 119, 149

 Psychological warfare 117
 Purushartha 99

 Raga 40
 Realized beings 69, 75
 Reincarnation 109
 Relationship with God 94
 Relationships 3
 Rishi sannyasa 115

 Sadhana 199
 Sadhana, regularity in 25, 126
 Sankalpa 3, 79
 Sannyasa 96, 188
 Sannyasa, tradition, origin and stages of 115, 152; jignasu sannyasa 74, 160; poorana sannyasa 50
 Sat Chandi Mahayajna 98
 Shatkarma 71
 Shivalingam 98
 Sleep 43
 Soul 63
 Sound vibration 142
 Spiritual life 107
 Spiritual name 37, 73, 149
 Stress 93
 Suffering 51, 86
 Supernatural power 165
 Surrender 204
 Swami Niranjanananda 68, 179
 Swami Satyananda 139, 198
 Swara 89

 Tattwa shuddhi 169
 Tratoka 7
 True identity 111, 129
 Truth 182

UFOs 65

Universal truths 195

Vedanta 46, 87

Veda 196

Vrittis 43

Yama and niyama 67, 120

Yoga 90, 92, 93, 104, 109, 152;
facilities 23 exercise and
147; horsemanship and 179;
religion and 76; the arts and
66; women and 186; hatha
71; improving performance
and 84; jnana 211; karma
48; kriya 123, 126, 169;
kundalini 71, 144; present
and future of 34, 56, 225;
teacher 11, 13, 18, 20, 72

Yoga nidra 122

Yoga Sutras 60

Yogic discipline 25, 99, 113,
137

Notes

Notes

Notes

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati during the eighties and nineties.

These early teachings, presented in their original question and answer format, contain a wealth of wisdom applicable to all yogic aspirants seeking guidance and inspiration for living a harmonious life. A yogi from birth, Swami Niranjan's approach combines practicality, empathy, compassion, warmth, humour and penetrating insight. No matter what the question, Swami Niranjan lends it an ease unique to him, bringing together an ancient spiritual tradition and an understanding of the current way of life. With each answer, he takes us right into the heart of the matter and provides a fresh perspective on it.

This volume covers satsangs given during 1996–1997 at Ganga Darshan, Munger. The topics covered are extensive and varied, addressing countless aspects of yoga, yogic lifestyle and spiritual life.



insert ISBN bar code

ISBN : 978-93-81620-26-7